

Lost Countess Erika

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Lost Countess Falka

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A Story of the Orient

By

Richard Henry Savage,

Author of "My Official Wife," "Checked
Through," "The Masked Venus," etc.



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LOST COUNTESS FALKA.

BOOK I.—Paying Off Old Scores.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE DEAD!—AFTER THE OPERA AT THE STEFAN'S KELLER—A RECOGNITION— THE WRONG MAN!

"Fideles Wien!" sighed Colonel Soltykoff of the Paul Regiment. "When shall I see you again?" He turned, heavy-hearted, to rejoin his friend Fraser Denton, who was gazing spellbound from the entrance of the foyer, at the opera box they had just quitted. It was a Lohengrin night, and the perfumed air trembled still with the delicious vibrations of the "Schwanenlied."

"All that's best of dark and bright!" murmured Denton, as the handsome Russian paused for a moment at his side. "She is certainly the handsomest woman in Europe!" cried the tall Muscovite, his fingers, gemmed with turquoise luck rings, tugging at his tawny mustache.

"Which one, Serge? Mother or daughter?" replied Denton, with a backward glance at the box where that golden young beauty, Countess Ilma Falka, shone out beside the peerless Grafin Magda. "Don't ask

such a question of a poor devil who leaves Wien, the very brightest spot on earth, to vegetate on the sandy shores of Odessa, as chief aide to an old bear of a Governor! By Jove, I would rather go back to Annenkoff's staff at Tashkend, than to be pent up among those low 'boutiquiers,' at that mongrel market town, Odessa. I have thrown my whole life away in the service! I swear, Denton, I will resign and then come back here!"

"Then, Countess Falka will soon re-enter society?" The American's voice was trembling with an eager interest! "Never!" gloomily rejoined Soltykoff, "unless your brilliant diplomat nephew makes the Republic richer, by a beautiful citizeness, that star of stars, Ilma! No! Denton. Grafin Magda has her secret reasons! She will never marry!"

"De l'audace! Toujours de l'audace!" smiled Denton. "Remember Ruy Gomez!" "Mon ami," dejectedly said the Russian. "Since I came back from Asia, in my two years tour here as Military Attaché, I have only learned a part of the sad story which keeps the woman whom I love a close recluse at Falkenstein!"

"Bela Batthyani has promised to tell me if Arpad Falka will give him leave! But, I leave here to-morrow for Odessa, and I have found out that a woman's 'Nay' may, for once, not be gainsaid!" The handsomest cavalier of all the glittering throng in the splendid galleries of the Hof-Oper, Serge Soltykoff, heeded not the flashing glances of the swan-necked Viennese women! "Ah!" queried Denton, "you will not wait for the hunt and the masked ball! Do you not go to Presburg?" "I have had my answer—an answer final, irrevocable!" groaned the Russian nobleman.

"How about Paul and Arpad Falka! You surely will say good-bye to them?" The American pitied the unhappy soldier. "Have they already left Vienna?" said Soltykoff, with a start.

"Arpad is down there, now, busied with hound,

horn and huntsmen, and my nephew is to be Master of Ceremonies at the ball! They have already been two days at Falkenstein. Come down there with me, and see them!" Fraser Denton laid his hand upon Soltykoff's shoulder in a friendly familiarity. "I tell you what I will do, Denton!" mused the Colonel. "I must go over now, and see Madame l'Ambassadrice. A single word from her lips to our chief is a command! I will ask for two days' delay, and then, wait at Budapest, for Paul and Arpad! We will have a jolly good-bye dinner at the Margarethen-Insel! Meet me at the Stefanskeller, after I have taken the ladies home, and then we will fix it up! I dare not trust myself, again, with Countess Magda Falka at Presburg. I might finish the work that Turcoman ball did so clumsily at Geok-Tépe!" And the soldier diplomat threaded the throng where the gilded youth of Wien envied the man whose passing brought a smile to a score of the dainty mobile faces of the mutine Viennoises.

"What is the bar? Poor Soltykoff is hard hit! Has she really given him the coup-de-grace at last?" Denton glanced back at the box he had quitted. There, a half dozen cavaliers were bending over the fair women in the loge. An Esterhazy was murmuring airy nothings to the fair-faced Hungarian blossom Ilma, while Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador bent over Grafen Magda Falka's hand. Captain Stein, a bronzed model of Uncle Sam's light cavalrymen, was busily recalling "the Point," to Miss Aida Denton, "la belle Americaine." "I must have Paul interrogate Arpad!" mused Denton. "There must be a way to bring together these two lovers, 'held tenderly apart!' While there is life there is hope!" he decided. "There are ways, through night to light!" And, gazing across the splendid scenario, he sighed for the vanished mother of his own dear child, a human blossom in this world's rose garden of Wien!—a lovely girl, and, a beauty!

"Shipmate ahoy!" rang out a cheery cry at his very elbow, as the astounded American was vigorously accosted by a rubicund old English veteran of an unmistakably salty flavor. "McIvor Pasha, by all that's holy!" cried Fraser Denton, in delight. "Where in the world did you come from?"

"London!" coolly said the old sailor. "And I'm bound again to the cloudless glow of eastern skies. To Egypt, where we two first met, twenty odd years ago. See here! I must see you; but I leave to-morrow morning for Constantinople! I shall stay a month there, and first run up to Sebastopol, then sail down through the Greek Sea, to 'bask' again in the shadows of the Pyramids! What have you got to show for all these years? Where have you been?"

The American led the stalwart old Admiral to the nearest dow! "I have been selling arms and cannon to continental governments since I doffed the fez! Russia, Austria, Germany, France, have been my stamping ground, as we Yankees say! Do you see that young girl in the second box, front row, the one in white, with violets? My Aida is all I have to show you, now! Come around to the Stefanskeller, after the opera! I shall take supper there with Soltykoff, the Russian Military Attache! We will then swop 'log books!'"

"So! That's your girl! She is a beauty!" heartily cried the old man-o'-warsman. "And—her mother?" He dropped his eyeglass hastily, as Denton sadly answered, "She lies sleeping in Père la Chaise, these many years—and we two are at home here in Vienna. My brother's widow takes care of Aida. Her son is Second Secretary of the United States Legation here!" "And you?" "Oh! I've been bowssing around the world since I retired from the Egyptian navy at poor old Ismail's downfall. They have made me a part of 'the British Debt,' and, I am going back to where the breeze of Araby the blest draws down the Shoubrah Road. Come over there, and sell some of your

guns and revolving cannons! We will beat up all the old haunts!"

"There goes the bell!" laughed Denton. "The British Lion's paw has 'wiped the eye' of the American eagle in Egypt! Coals to Newcastle, now! Be sure to cast anchor after the opera at the Stefan's Keller!" The jolly old sea dog nodded an assent and forged away, his broad bulk parting the waves of the Viennese "show" society, leaving a rippling wake in these shallows of this beautiful Vanity Fair! There was the magnetic thrill of a thousand hearts bounding in passion—a thousand pairs of eyes gleaming in mocking Austrian witchery and Fraser Denton was borne backward on the tide of the rushing years! It seemed but a little span of life! The quarter of a century, when he, once the boy captain of a Rhode Island battery, sought fame and fortune in the service of Ismail Pasha, the great Khedive. "Eheu fugaces! Gone—scattered! The strange motley court gathered around Ismail! What a change from sixty-eight to ninety!" and, Fraser Denton's eyes were clouded with the mists of other days, as he wended his way back to the box to listen to the mimic anguish of Ortrud and Teiramund. There was a glow of triumph in Serge Soltykoff's eyes as he stole back into the box, having escaped from his vivacious countrywoman, Princess Mouravief. "Compliments of Madame l'Ambassadrice to the three graces!" he whispered to the one woman of the whole world, the seething world, of his tortured heart. "Princess Mouravief truly says that the whole house is 'regardant!'"

"Have you, too, learned to flatter, Serge? I thought that you were above such a weakness!" Grafyn Falka then dropped her fan in a strange confusion, as her dark eyes rested for a moment on the face of the courtly Russian. "I am above nothing that would lead me to your feet, Magda!" he whispered. The entreaty was not lost upon Fraser Denton, who muttered, "Poor devil! He is bound to the rack! something bars his

way. He is unhappy, and I only stand mutely waiting at the sealed tomb of the past—waiting for the last bugle call, Lights out! For—the dead never come back!” Fraser Denton, erect and soldierly still, at fifty, gazed out gloomily at the painted unrealities of the stage, while the third act dragged its mimic sorrows away.

He was conscious that there were batteries of lorgnettes levelled upon them. Even the Imperial loge deigned to notice the three superb women of Soltykoff's last opera party. Scores of the dashing aristocrats knew of the steadfast passion of the romantic Russian cavalier for the patrician young widow who had not graced gay Vienna's balls since Gabor Falka's tragic death left her alone in the world! There were bright eyes challenging that merry dare devil cousin Bèla Batthyani, the curled darling of the “Queen's Own,” who, forgetting all, chatted in easy familiarity with the sparkling Ilma, and light hearts beat nervously under swelling silks and laces to wonder where on this night of nights was Arpad, the last Count Falka, whose place as Captain of the Hungarian Body Guard led him into the august circle of the most exclusive court of Christendom—the only one now closed to “Brummagem” and “Boodle!” But the Austrian men, with fierce glittering eyes, fixed their hawk-like glances on Magda Falka's queenly form! Seated, a very queen of night, in black lace and silver, the flashing diamond stars on her brow only accentuated her dark beauty. It was a sad, noble face, with the exquisite tints of her pale cheek, there lit up with the dark, gleaming, mournful eyes. These eyes had lost their passion, but their sweetness lingered still. The Falka pearls were clasped around the neck of this passive Venus de Milo, and her lips only parted in a smile, when she whispered in answer to Serge Soltykoff's veiled entreaty! The agony of a good-bye which might be eternal! For, womanlike, she would not have him go, and yet she dared not bid him stay!

And, this tragedy was real. Ilma Falka's golden hair was her legacy of love from the father she had never seen, but the eyes of the peerless mother were her natal gift to the pearl of Hungary. At eighteen, in the "*primavera della vita*," Ilma Falka's impassioned beauty was a startling foil to the sad serenity of the lovely mother, whose widowhood had given her a sister-ship of sorrow with the richest heiress of proud Hungary. The daughter of Columbia, rapt in the entrancing melodies of the master singer, gazed out upon the princely stage with her beautiful brown eyes veiled in a mist of unshed tears! Her exquisite face was glorious in the bright promise written there; there were nobles who envied the Russian violets, rising and falling upon the fleecy muslin folds of her corsage. It was a strangely cemented friendship, sorrow's seal, which led grave Fraser Denton to the side of Magda Falka. Their children, nymphs of the morning of life, were already companions of the heart, and the soldier, still steadfast to the memory of the loved and lost, was far nearer to Magda Falka's sleeping heart than the haughty cold-faced Austrian magnates, who wooed in vain the beautiful Lady of Falkenstein. Countess Magda Falka's hand trembled as Soltykoff led her out into the laughing throng crowding the splendid staircases, and the open loggia, where knots of lovers lingered, now making trysts there under the stars dancing in the blue heavens! All Vienna thronged the superb Renaissance fane on the Opernring. The winged horses, high in air above them, seemed ready to soar away in the land of light loves and happy laughter. Fraser Denton, uneasy at heart, watched keenly every movement of the princely pair, whose life path was to part here under those silent stars! For this parting was no sweet sorrow. The Russian had drawn Gräfin Magda aside for a moment, and his blue eyes blazed like the wintry pole star, when he murmured: "I shall not see you again. Have you not a single word, after all these years, Magda?"

"What can divide them?" was Denton's inward query. Soltykoff is of the oldest boyars! A superb soldier! His fortune is of a barbaric Russian opulence! The chosen friend of the Czarovitch!" He gazed while pretty Aida Denton's eyes now ruefully followed Bela Batthyani, soon lost in the departing waves of fashion, with his precious charge, the dazzling Ilma.

"Will she let him go without a word of hope? Ah! Magda! It is only the dead who cannot come back!" Denton sprang forward with sudden alarm, as Graf Falka suddenly uttered a smothered shriek. A burly stranger brushed past the father, and the frightened daughter, too, was at his side, when, his face as pale as marble, Serge Soltykoff bore the senseless woman into the open door of the nearest loge. Denton, quick-witted and alert, his senses tuned to the crash of battle and the 'scapes of the field, had caught the startled cry, "My God! That man here!" and he sprang quickly down the sculptured staircase in search of the tall intruder who had seemed to menace the Austrian beauty. There was only a single glimpse of a bearded giant, clad in the costume of a Turkish diplomat! The red fez was lost to view at the first turn of the stairs, but Fraser Denton noted the jewelled orders and the sweeping soldierly mustache, giving a European finish to the flowing golden beard.

"A strange Turk!" he muttered, darting back, as Soltykoff's voice reached him in appealing accents! "See to the carriage, Denton! Quick! And bring Batthyani here!" There was a crowd of obsequious attendants ready to aid, as the Lady of Falkenstein slowly descended the staircase at last!

"Do not leave me! Not an instant! I beg of you! Let us hasten to Ilma!" were the faltered words which greeted Bela Batthyani's excited questions. And, clinging to the two strong men, Magda Falka shivered in abject terror, until her daughter clasped her in her arms, safe at last in the waiting carriage. "Drive on!

"I will follow with Miss Aida," cried Bela, as the two elder men entered the carriage. The Opern Ring was all deserted as the carriage rolled away, and Fraser Denton gazed anxiously out of the window, while Soltykoff's whispers alone broke the silence. The maddening parting moment came all too soon, when the splendid town house of the Falkas was reached! It was Serge Soltykoff who alone aided the Countess to mount the marble steps, guarded by huge bronze lions, bearing the quartered shields of the proud patrician house. Denton waited, his heart beating in sympathy with the luckless lover.

"Come to me with the news as soon as you can, at the Stefans keller!" hoarsely muttered Soltykoff, who came reeling back from the lighted drawing room, as one who had received his sudden order to lead a forlorn hope. Denton bowed with a sorely stricken heart, for he had caught but the one farewell whisper, "I will telegraph daily, and if you need me, a single word will bring me back from Odessa!" There had been no spoken word in answer, and Fraser Denton knew too well that his friend was going out into a world now a desert to him. The old story of hopes that failed, of a hungry and sorrowing heart.

"This is more than strange," mused the American, a half hour later, when Batthyani joined him in the waiting carriage. "The young ladies will both remain with the Countess!" said the bewildered young officer. "Countess Magda has had a sudden shock of the gravest nature! She seems to be in some mortal terror! You know that we Hungarians are a strange race! Fiery, ardent, superstitious and mercurial. It's useless! I offered all my services! I even proposed to telegraph to Arpad! The Countess only shook her head and demanded Josef, her house intendant. 'We leave here to-morrow as early as possible!' she said, and then in Magyar, she bade him closely guard the house during the night. I can make nothing of it, for all Countess Magda would say was, 'I have

seen some one whom I had long numbered with the dead! Dead for many years! A hideous vision!"

"So!" muttered Denton, "the dead do come back! This bodes no good to Soltykoff, poor fellow!" The young soldier appealingly cried, as the coupé rolled on toward the Stephans platz, "What do you make of it, Major Denton?" "I make this of it, Bela!" resolutely said the American, "I can answer you if you will now tell us of this past mystery of the Falkas! Arpad is the head of your house! He is away! Here are Soltykoff and myself! You should either call Arpad and Paul up by telegraph, or else take the lead yourself! It is a grave responsibility!"

"You are right!" gloomily rejoined the young guardsman, "I will tell Soltykoff and you all that I know—promise or no promise! I will get leave and escort Countess Magda and Ilma down the Danube to-morrow. She also expects you to go with her! and she says that she only feels safe now at Falkenstein! There's an end of our family's life at court! Did you see this strange fellow who seems to have called up some old sorrow? I wish that I had him up before me at ten paces!" and the fiery young magnate ground his teeth in a helpless rage.

"Was it the Turk? That fellow's face seemed strangely familiar!" anxiously brooded Denton. "He rushed down the stairs by me like a bull of Bashan! I've seen that brutal face before!" "I will leave you to your supper, after I have seen Soltykoff, and then gallop over to Barracks, and wake up the Adjutant. I can get a two days' leave! I will come back to you and then sleep at the house! I told Josef so! You can there confer alone with the Colonel! By heavens! I wish that Countess Magda would marry Soltykoff and go away to Russia. He has a royal old place at Moscow, and I have hunted bears at his place in Tambov! It is a dream of savage grandeur! And, Soltykoff has served his sad probation!" "How about Countess Ilma? Don't you see the social awkward-

ness?" gravely said Major Denton. Bela Batthyani burst out laughing. "My dear Major! You are a wonder as to cannons and small arms, but blind in Cupid's warfare! If Paul Denton is the man I take him for, he will soon lead my beautiful cousin far away from Presburg! Perhaps that event would give Soltykoff his innings! He is of the Libro d'oro, and as fine a soldier as ever drew sword! But, here we are at the Stephans Keller!" "I think that I see daylight ahead!" cried Denton, springing from the coupé. "But I must first learn the secret of the past! There is some ground apparently for Countess Magda's seclusion!" The young soldier paused at the door. "Major!" he said earnestly, "make Arpad himself tell you the whole story! Tell him that I feel forced to confide in you to-night! I can not let these two dear women of our house face their secret enemies unguarded! I would die for them!" The boy's bright face was glowing with generous bravery. "So would I!" said Denton, solemnly, as the great bell of the Stephans Dom boomed out twelve, far above them, where the exquisite spire pierced the thin blue night air! The darkling shadows wrapped the vast old gothic pile, and a black mantle hid the wondrous tracery of fretted stone, as they entered the modest doorway of the famous haunt of the Wiener bon vivants. "Two gentlemen waiting for you, Herr Major!" gutturally cried Ernest, the autocratic Oberkellner of Vienna's "Trois Frères," when the friends passed in through the narrow hall of the unpretentious three-story habitat of the modern Brillât Savarins, "I've saved you the very best table!" The steward bowed, rattling his silver chain of office, as he pocketed a double florin. Major Denton, bewildered in the glare of the brilliantly lit rooms, gazed at the laughing midnight congerie of the lightest hearted people on earth. The officer gazed in wonder as the portly British sailor seized Denton in his bear hug, twisting him round! "Now, I've got you, old comrade!" McIvor shouted.

"Quick! Quick! Denton! Look there! Don't you know that chap? But I'm a lubber if he has not swapped his skin!"

"Where?" gasped Denton, as the Admiral pointed to a throng of men squeezing out of the narrow passage. There were arch women faces, beaming languishing invitation from their wicked Wiener eyes, as the carriages bustled away. "Hello! What's up?" blurted out McIvor Pasha, as Denton quickly sprang out of his grasp and rushed out bareheaded into the gloomy Stefan Platz! Lieutenant Bela Batthyani nervously twirled his hussar mustache, and gazed in wonder at Serge Soltykoff, who had darted after Denton. "It's the devil's own night, a Walpurgis nacht! Every one seems tarantula bitten!" growled the junker.

"By God! I lost him! He got away in a carriage!" groaned Fraser Denton, as he returned with Soltykoff. There were dozens of eyeglasses and several dainty pince-nez centered upon the "crazy American." "Lost who, for God's sake?" demanded Bela.

"That Turkish scoundrel who alarmed the Countess!" growled Denton, "and I know I have seen that brute before!" "Right you are! I boarded him, too, and he denied his name!" fumed stout old McIvor. "Don't you remember Becker Bey at Cairo?" Fraser Denton's face grew fixed and stern. "Give us a private room at once!" he abruptly said to the astonished steward; and then he addressed himself to the formality of introductions! But, though Colonel Soltykoff and Admiral McIvor Pasha fell into instant reminiscence of a hundred mutual friends, the dashing Lieutenant of the Queen's Own had vanished. "It's a devil of a night! Bring the Graf Batthyani up to us, Ernest, and send up the best supper you ever cooked, for four!"

"Mind that yellow seal Chambertin! Now, gentlemen! I want you both behind closed doors!" Denton found time to whisper to Soltykoff, "Silence as to the affair at the opera! I wish to draw the old Ad-

miral out!" The Russian nodded as they entered the room. They had tried but one round of the famous brown beer that even Imperial personages dare not disdain, when Bela Batthyani rattled into the room! His sabre clanked and his jacket was slung from his shoulder. "I've not much time to spare, Major Denton, my horse and jager are here! But I have tipped the head waiter! That fellow, the big Turk, is Mustapha Pasha, who has been a guest at the Ottoman Embassy here for a fortnight! He is a money spinner, fond of the little soupers à deux, above." The giddy Batthyani blushed, conscience stricken, "And, knows his Vienna to a charm! Felix tells me that he shows up mostly at night, and the devil of it is, he chatters in Magyar, like an old Honved!"

There was a roar from the old sea dog! "Mustapha Pasha be damned! He is only our old chevalier d'industrie, Waldemar Becker Bey transformed!" Serge Soltykoff delayed the introduction of the young Hussar to the irate Admiral by springing up and upsetting a half dozen beer seidels! "There's a devil's witch dance going on somewhere! I've never seen him! But there was a famous soldier of fortune of that name in our Guard once! A present from the lower Danube! He had been in our secret service in Roumania! When he left our Guard he took away an old general's pretty second wife and left his heir, a young ensign of Ours, dying from a ball in his lungs! A smooth, versatile scoundrel!" "See, here, Major!" whispered Batthyani, "I will gallop over and get my leave! Keep a bit of supper for me! I will not leave Countess Magda till she is safe at Presburg! This thing looks very strange! Arpad alone knows all the old story. Now you can sound the old Egyptian Admiral! Keep him in the dark! I will be back in two hours, and I would rather not have Soltykoff here! If he comes into our family later, then well and good! I know that Paul and Ilma are souls destined for each other, and you were my foster father, almost, at the Cadet haus."

"Then we can leave it to Arpad himself to post Colonel Soltykoff!" Denton nodded and the handsome Hussar lad sprang down the stair! In an instant the clatter of hoofs told that the wild Balthyani was on his matchless charger!

It was a goodly table whereat Admiral McIvor Pasha, retired, late of the Khedive's navy, did the honors by virtue of seniority. His round, red face shone out above a vast plateau of snowy napkin as he spliced the main brace and reeled off a plain "spun yarn!" "You are safe speaking in English here!" laughed Soltykoff. "Tell us now of your own *rencontre!*"

"He has the devil's own brass! This chap!" sputtered McIvor Pasha. "You know, Denton, Gordon and the English regime sent all your twenty-four American officers flying just after you resigned. Of the foreign army contingent there was left only Stone, Purdy (on leave), Colonel Mason and Major Feché, with one or two more closing up their service, or scattered far away over Darfour and Abyssinia. But I hung on to my own Red Sea naval command, under the aegis of stout old Mother Britannia.

"But Stanton, our Consul General, told me that several continental foreign equerries and officers still clung on with despairing clutch. There was Ali Bey Italiani and an English chap, a discarded Guardsman, and a little coterie of flatterers who hung around Cherif Pasha, and apparently slaved for Ismail Khedive, while really spying on him! Now, if you remember, this Waldemar Becker Bey used to train a huge horizontal mustache and haunt the green rooms of the Grand Opera! He was Master of Pleasures in general to Cherif and other Moslem *bon vivants*. He was a sort of Monsieur Parolles. I despised his smug face and the thin white fingers covered with ladies' rings, in fact, his whole 'chessycat' exterior! If you remember, there were some ugly stories about that Greek roulette game on the *Ésbékiah!* There was the

young Arab officer, too, who was butchered in that midnight sword duel! A brave self-sacrifice, for the poor fellow was purblind!" McIvor Pasha then slaked his rising indignation with a huge hock and seltzer. "Well! When I went back to settle about my retirement and pension, it was long after the bombardment of Alexandria! I found that our sneaking *élégant* had really turned Mussulman, and gone off in Ismail's train as a sort of military Leporello! But he left a shining track behind! The poor fellows who stuck to their guns at Ras-el Tin fort, waited vainly to see the English ironclads rise in the air! Lay and Beverly Lennon had a splendid torpedo system laid down and I'm told that this fellow, Becker Bey, stole all the secret plans, sold them to the English, and removed the butterfly valves and springs from all the White-heads in stock! All was useless! Hobart Pasha, my old shipmate, told me later this fellow had been rewarded and promoted, and was a secret spy of the Sultan, watching over Ismail in his gilded Nirvana of luxurious harem prison life! You remember Fal-ladeen, the Holder of the Girdle of Beautiful Forms! Well! This fellow became immensely rich, and changed into a sort of all round man milliner on the Bosphorus! To-night I ran plump across him here in the Stefans Keller! I had an idea he was fighting a little shy! So I walked up and hit him a whack between the shoulders! 'Hello, Becker!' I hailed him! 'I knew him well, though he's taken on proud flesh, lots of it! The beggar only looked me square in the eye! He fumbled for a card case and then muttered, 'Istambol!'—shamming Turk! There's the card!" cried McIvor, fishing a crumpled pasteboard from a capacious vest pocket. "'Istambol be blowed!' say I, as he then wagged his head, and whispered to a fat little squab of a Turk with him, 'There's that fleuret mark still on your temple, my boy, and you've got the big sapphire and diamond ring on yet that you won of poor Sparrow Purdy that night at Marie de Rohan's

supper party!' Would you believe it, he scuttled off then like a fiddler crab, and you ran right over him as he cut his hawser! Now, what's he masquerading around here for?" The old veteran glared around, oblivious of the gravity of the two elder men. He returned to his liquid solace, panting and indignant!

"Mustapha Pasha—Istambol!" slowly read off Colonel Serge Soltykoff, as he deciphered the visiting card, whose back also bore the same title in Turkish characters! "See here, Denton!" said the Russian, "I will have to ask you to excuse me! I'll run around and wake up Dragmiroff, our First Secretary! He will sound the Dragoman of the Turkish Embassy about this fellow's business. I will expect you at the Sud Bahn, for my train leaves at ten. The Dragoman is a sly Armenian, and one of our spies," he faintly smiled, "and thus I'll have Mustapha's *livre de service* explored! Dragmiroff will warn you at once, and I will wait two days at Budapest—Grand Hotel Hungaria. Don't forget! I know that you want to talk over your old Nile days with the Pasha here." He saluted and sped away! Denton and Soltykoff stood a moment with clasped hands outside the door. "Fraser! I leave her to you! For God's sake! watch over Magda! There is some sinister influence here! You and Batthyani must put Arpad on his guard! It is a hell on earth to me that I must leave this woman, who is all of earth's brightness now! Come early to the station! Tell me all there. I must report at Odessa! Noblesse oblige! A soldier's honor! But if Magda Falka needs me, you must telegraph to the Cercle de Noblesse, Odessa. I'd throw up the Czar's favor if that woman would only open her arms! By God! I will win her yet! Think of my lonely life! You have your daughter! I am only an exile from Paradise! Send Arpad and Paul to me! Come yourself also if there is any danger!"

"Trust to me, Serge!" said the soldierly American. "You may yet unlock the mystery! Away to Dragmiroff! I'll meet you!"

The minutes slipped rapidly away as the two old comrades, once serving under Egypt's star and crescent, wandered back into the clouded past of Ismail's secretly planned movement to throw off the Turkish yoke. Each had gained a high vantage ground in life, and, warmed by the matchless wine of the Stefans Keller, they spoke of the ardent spirits who had tempted fortune in those heyday years of the great Ismail Pasha! The brave and bright and good had succumbed! Only the traitors and adventurers seemed to have flourished there in the world's greatest hot house of intrigue. They toasted the fallen in life's bitter fight! And

"Full many a friend in battle slain,
And, all the war that either knew,
Was called up, once, again!"

"It's time to sling hammocks now!" cried the cheery old Admiral, as two o'clock boomed out from Meister Wenzla's grand old gothic fane. "Only the boys and these diamond-eyed witch devil girls here can stand the 'dog watch!' See here, Denton, I'll secretly post Loftus, our Ambassador at Constantinople, about this lubber, Mustapha Becker! Look out for him! He's an ugly devil! Did you ever have any trouble with him? You were a bit gay, my boy, in those old Cairene days!" Fraser Denton laughed uneasily. "Oh! no! We got on well enough after he found I could not miss the bell at twenty paces with a revolver!"

"Well! He's got it in for somebody!" growled Mc-Ivor Pasha. "Tell your Russian friend to look out for himself! Soltykoff is a fine fellow! I remember his father, Prince Soltykoff, on Mentchikoff's staff at Sebastopol! They all came down to take a look at me when the Nicholas fort blew my little gunboat to pieces! Come to think of it, the Turk and your Russian friend were glaring fiercely at each other when I 'called him down!' Did they have a row at the opera? If there's any fight, have Soltykoff choose pistols and get the beggar close up! He's a regular wiz-

ard with the sword! I'll go you a five pound note there's a woman at the bottom of this row! You see, Fraser, you and I are on the 'retired list' now! Now mind you 'Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo.' To think of that beggar turning up again jack in the box!"

Major Denton returned to the "banquet hall deserted," and nervously strode up and down the lonely room! His spare, neat soldierly figure was as trim and erect as in the days when he lit hand grenades with his cigar and tossed them over into the ditch of Fort Sanders at Knoxville! Close cropped gray hair, a bronzed face, a prominent nose, and two steady steel colored eyes, he was yet of athletic mould, and a dangerous customer to tackle! He nervously puffed his cigar. "So! The dead can return! What can that heavenly woman have to hide from Serge Soltykoff? Sorrow may have touched her, but shame never! And yet these old princely houses have their skeleton closets! Is there any legal bar to her union with Serge? God help the man who comes between them now! One thing is clear! Bela and I must get both the ladies quietly out of town! By Jove, the steamer! Yes! If there is any chance of a rencontre, any spying, it would be on the train! I'll speak to Bela! Ah! *Le voici!*" The sound of springing feet was heard, and the lithe Lieutenant came bounding up the stairs! "Here! Johann!" he cried. "A flask of seltzer! Your best cognac! The night air is chill! Now, Major Denton, let us make our plan! We are alone!" He tossed his hussar jacket and sabre on a divan. Denton nodded, and silently watched the agitated boy as he rolled a couple of cigarettes. "I hate to speak of the old matter!" cried the youth, pushing away his glass. "Basta! We have no time to fool away. When Gabor Falka brought Magda Stahrenberg home to Schloss Falkenstein, a bride at eighteen, she was the most thrilling and impassioned beauty of her time. Count Falka had been transferred from the 'Queen's Own' and given the command of a regiment of the wildest

Honveds, whom no one else could handle! He was a model soldier, a gallant sportsman and a passionate lover. You know the family pride of the Falkas!

"Sternly loyal, Count Gabor could not forget in wearing Austrian facings that his own mail clad ancestors had ridden in the princely ring when Hungary's monarch challenged the world from the summit of the Königshugel! When not on regimental duty he disdained the splendid dalliance of the court of the Hapsburgs and kept open hall at Falkenstein, going far away into the wildest fastnesses of the Carpathians in the chase! A mighty hunter and a princely host! Only old Matthias, the head forester, lives to-day at Presburg, to recall the days of Count Gabor's splendid rule. It may be that young Magda Stahremberg pined for the merry mummeries of Wien! If she did, then her gentle dignity veiled it! Still, she was lonely, and at last one mad fool dared to presume upon her wifely patience!

"The Adjutant of Falka's regiment, a wild young blood, one of those devilish insouciant lady killers, was mad enough to throw himself at her feet, with true Hungarian vehemence! Arpad at this time was a two years' sturdy lad, and poor Ilma was born later, a fatherless child. Then it was the one silver lock was whitened in my cousin's head as by a sword cleft! For Magda Falka, affrighted at the mad lover's insolence, screamed for help, and the fierce house retainers threw the wild Kinsky into the depths of the old stone round tower there on the hill! A man rode out as the fiends of hell ride, and Gabor Falka sped homeward with bloodshot eyes! He waited not to clasp his sobbing wife to his arms, but he strode away to the tower with his huntsmen! They tore off the brute's uniform, and in the open court the wretch was lashed by the maddened huntsman till his flesh hung in ribbons!

"The Count stood with folded arms and never changed a muscle! When the suffering captive howled for mercy he coldly cried, 'Turn him loose!'

and then the maddened hounds chased the semblance of humanity afar!"

Bela Batthyani sighed. He caught Denton's eye, and muttered, "I will be brief! After four years, Gabor Falka brought Magda back from Italy. His proud spirit yet rankled under the insult and he rode far into his forests, lonely and abstracted. One night the Count's riderless horse returned alone! The forest was soon lit up with the torches of the searchers, and in a dell by a spring, where he had dismounted, they found his body stark and cold! He had been shot from ambush, but a dagger also transfixed his nerveless breast! A scrawl in Magyar bore the words, 'Death and shame, forever, to the accursed Falkas!'"

Batthyani rose and paced the room. "It is nearly nineteen years since his murder! Magda hovered between life and death, when Ilma came as a gleam of sunshine! It may be that Falka knew his doom! The Kinsky blood was as boiling as any Magyar strain, and Janos Kinsky has been lost to men's mind for many a long year! Be it as it may, Countess Magda has feared the shadowy enemy since that fatal day! Arpad knows all! Perhaps more, for Matthias fears even now to speak! But I am sure that our darling Ilma is unaware of the gloomy inheritance! Now as to my cousin's alarm! This strange encounter in the opera house! Was there a shadowy resemblance? She fears even the sound of the drifted leaf! Not for herself! But for Arpad and for Ilma! The Kinskys never forget! They bear the murderer's horseshoe—the Tartar seal of violent death, and of the black code of revenge!"

"It's a gloomy story," solemnly said Denton. "Ride over to the house! Do not leave Countess Magda a moment till I return from seeing Soltykoff at the Sudbahn!" Fraser Denton tossed upon a restless pillow until the morning red awakened him. He was eager in his questioning glance, as he singled out the Russian guardsman in the busy throng at the station. Sol-

tykoff was haggard and his brow was dark. He drew Denton aside. "Watch over Magda like a she wolf guarding her litter! The Dragoman swears that this fellow is an impostor! There is no Mustapha Pasha known at the Legation!" and their faces grew graver until the parting came, as they talked in whispers!

CHAPTER II.

A VANISHING PASHA!—THE MASKED BALL AT FALKENSTEIN!—A SINISTER UNBIDDEN GUEST!—ILMA'S TRYST.

Fraser Denton stood for a moment irresolute, as the "Constantinople special" tore away out of the Sud Bahn! He had fought off a last burning desire to tell Soltykoff the whole story. For the Russian was also eager to trace out the history of the man in the red fez! "Did you learn aught from McIvor, or from Bela?" the Colonel persisted. The Major hesitated a moment. "There are a thousand scoundrelly fez wearers knocking around the Danube always, Soltykoff!" replied Denton. "Spies, voluptuaries, renegades, har-em officials on vile missions, and secret Turkish agents! It looks as if we had annoyed the wrong man! As for Countess Magda, there is the emotional woman nature and the thrall of Wagner's wonder picture in song, to account for her seizure! And, Serge, you have been pressing her hard! Perhaps it was only a 'prise des nerfs!' We can tell little till Bela goes over the whole ground with Arpad, and I have Paul down there to aid me!"

"You are right, Fraser!" mournfully said the Russian, wringing his hand in parting. "Every other man from Buda to Galatz is a fez wearer, and the

honors are easy as to their brutality! Only remember this, you guard my life in watching over Magda. She was certainly very exaltée! I wait at Budapest for some turn of the tide!

"Don't forget, if the Countess should wish to communicate, Hotel Hungaria!" The blue-eyed Russian's great heart beat fondly under the hidden handkerchief he had stolen in loving duplicity the night before; and, a knot of violets which had fallen from her breast now lay crushed therein! His own nerves still tingled, for he had borne the precious burden of her loveliness in his sinewy arms! "By God!" the son of Rurik cried, "If I only had her down in my Kherson stronghold I would plant Tartar lances on every grave mound to the far horizon and hide her from a host of foes! All the world could not harm her there!"

"Wait and hope! Your time may come!" said Denton, pitying the anguish in the despondent lover's eyes.

"I think that I'll hunt up McIvor Pasha now and say good-bye!" mused Denton, as he called a droschky. "The old sea dog always keeps an eye to windward!" and as he sped on to the Hotel Imperial he pondered, "Shall I question the Countess?" He could not resolve the problem. The story of the last night lingered in his mind! He well knew that the Stahremberg blood was as proud and wild as the Falka or even the mad Kinsky strain! "Had she stooped to conquer? Was it a case of *chateau qui parle*?" He well knew the fiery philtre of Venus coursing in the veins of the fair faced children of old Vidobona, where woman's witchery once brought Maximilian I.'s realms proof against the Austrian sword! And the fiery pulses of the daughters of Arpad had thrilled to his own boyish touch! Witch women, delicate and defiant, changing as the many hued sea, fond in their light loves, fierce in their revenge! "Was this Kinsky vagabond, or victim?" He sighed as he drew up at the hotel. "I will drift with the tide of events!" he decided. His spirits

rose as McIvor Pasha, huge in tweeds, belted with glass and red book, suddenly bore down upon him from the breakfast room!

"Ha! Denton! How kind of you! Here, one moment! My boat is on the shore, so to speak!" The mariner towed him into the deserted smoking room. "I was just over at the bank and I turned out Wyndham, my old chum at the Embassy, too! There is a mystery about this big Moslem! Two straws I have picked up! The secret controller of Ismail's pleasures at Dolma-Baghtché has been up here a fortnight and has handled immense sums of gold, using the ex-Khedive's own signet ring! You know what that means! Several bright particular stars of opera and stage have quickly vanished behind this golden cloud! The local Jupiter winks at these little skirmishes under the flag of Venus! The banker won't talk! I taxed him with 'Mustapha Pasha.' He only smiled and silently offered me his best cigars!" The old Admiral keenly eyed the clock hands crawling along!

"Now! Wyndham tells me that people here have bought the whole plans of the torpedo defenses and hidden war plant on the Bosphorus and at the Dardanelles from a chap who used to be in the Egyptian service. It's a deal that our people have been vainly having a shy at for many long years! You know that the sick man may have a last paroxysm at any time! Well, when I suggested the name of Waldemar Becker Bey, and recalled Alexandria, Wyndham just grinned a sickly grin and then asked me to send him two dispatch bags full of cigarettes from Cairo! Now I'm sure the beggar knows, d'ye see? He won't tell! It's too risky!"

"Yes, and he will keep on knowing!" replied the Yankee artilleryman. "Old friend! If you and I wish to get at the roots of this thing, we must dig deep and dig alone! It would be just like our precious scallawag of olden days. I can see him as he was! The slim rascal, with his Koorbash handle set in dia-

monds and blinking at the Passing Show in Cairo with those lazy, devilish blue eyes of his! I believe it really was that military autolycus, Becker Bey! He may have blossomed into a Pasha, by the Devil's adoption! A smart two handed stroke, to serve both Mars and Venus here! To sell out, both friend and foe, and fill his remarkably baggy pockets!" The old Admiral listened and snorted his adieu.

"Now, my boy! Mind your eye. Remember that this devil is a dangerous pioneer in the dark! Where shall I address you?" The ancient mariner weighed anchor, for his man, "Scrubbs," rosy of hue, stood waiting at the door, with the regulation bundle of alpenstocks, cricket bats, hockey clubs, canes and tennis paddles, which Britons of rank lug around with them all over the world! It was high time to set out!

"Anglo-Austrian Bank, Stephans Platz 2," cried Denton. "They reach me all over the world, by wire or letter! As for me, if I am thrown up against Becker Bey, I will do him 'to the Queen's taste!' Fortiter in ré, you know."

"I've got it in for him, too, a little old grudge!" ejaculated the doughty Admiral, as he forced his manly brawn into a quaking carriage, and the old sailor glowered fiercely at his invisible foe! Denton laughed in spite of all his cares, as the Admiral was borne out of his sight. "Was it his good golden Turkish pounds, or some modern Cleopatra of uneasy tenure, that Becker filched from him? It must have been some shrewd turn of villainy!" and Denton at last decided upon "personally conducted" roulette as the "casus belli." On his way back to the lion-guarded town house the American weighed all the stories of the past. "I have it! If it is really Becker Bey, the ubiquitous, then he may have been startled at recognizing stern old McIvor, and later running up plump against me! His discomfiture was capped by the second encounter with our party at the Stephans Keller."

Denton slowly ascended the steps, where the gold

banded yagers were already in waiting. He concluded his survey of the whole incident. "Under whatever name he might masquerade, Becker would surely fear McIvor's presence, and also shun a recognition by me. Both his deeds of darkness here needed secrecy, for the sale of these secret plans might cost him his head!"

"The light flesh and corrupt blood, too, must be gingerly handled to avoid public scandal here. I'll wager that he has cut out and they have prudently ignored him at the Ottoman Embassy. The catspaw of Ismail Pasha's jaded lusts—a secret spy on the whole clique of Egyptian state prisoners on the Bosphorus—this rascally soldier of fortune must needs cheat all his masters, and his first care would naturally be to avoid all old Egyptian officials! The memories of the Alexandria deal might have spoiled this Bosphorus bargain, and also cost him his head! And as to the Countess! Her nerves simply broke down under the strain of the parting from Soltykoff! The vanishing Pasha was probably only getting out of our way! Still, it was a strange affair!" The young beauties in the great drawing room were visibly pouting, as Major Denton entered. He had hardly received a fatherly greeting from Miss Aida when Lieutenant Batthyani appealed to him for aid. "I have been trying to reconcile these ladies to a week's delay in the masked ball at Falkenstein! The doctor, while permitting Countess Magda—nay, ordering her, to go to Presburg—strictly requires a few days of quiet!"

"We will miss half our Vienna friends!" mourned the golden-haired Ilma. "Never mind!" cried Bela, "I will return and rally them all!" Denton was overjoyed to see that neither of the laughing girls had divined any sinister event of the "*sortie de l'opera*." Bela found time to whisper, "We are to say nothing—absolutely nothing!" as Countess Magda descended the grand stair ready for her journey.

Fraser Denton's reverential greeting was accepted

with a meaning smile, as the family cortege passed out of the doors guarded by the assembled house retainers. Denton noted the armed yager on the box of the first carriage, and he saw, too, with a secret pleasure, that Batthyani's orderly rode at the window, where the fair face of Countess Magda gazed out on the curious throngs passing down the Canal Quai. The Major, too, was armed at all points; his latest development of American revolver ingenuity was ready at hand in his breast pocket! There was the sound of merry girlish laughter ringing out gaily from the second carriage, as the great Victoria trundled over the Franzens brücke! A cable's length away lay the dainty Danube pleasure craft of the Countess, and there the attendants waited, cap in hand, at the gangway. As Major Denton stepped out of the carriage he heard a faint appeal! "Quick, there! That man, again!" He sprang around the carriage and had just one momentary glimpse of a scarlet fez, flashing around the angle of a side street!

With a smothered oath, Denton aided the trembling patrician to alight! In another moment he was hurrying her down to the cabin, where the blue silk curtains shaded the plate glass windows! "For God's sake, do not show yourself again till we are out on the Danube!" he said, with a sudden emotion. "If you are being followed, we will trap the brute later. I will tell Arpad of this as soon as I see him!" The Lady of Falkenstein then clutched Denton's arm convulsively and whispered, "For God's sake! not a word! Arpad must not know! I will take all the proper steps myself! For I am safe at Falkenstein!"

"But you will tell me of your trouble! What do you fear?" anxiously cried Denton, who had surely recognized again the sturdy back and sweeping golden beard of the burly Turk!

"Send me the captain! Not a word to Bela! I will tell you all at Presburg! We must hasten away!"

The tall American walked the deck in a grave un-

rest, as the beautiful boat sped down along the Donau Canal, and passed out by the Prater Quai! He eyed the Budapest boat about to start. It was crowded with passengers! There were scores of the passengers who wore the red fez! "Pshaw!" he muttered, biting his cigar. "To be startled by a strolling vagabond! There may be another secret! What is it that Magda would hide from her children? The secret which divides her from Soltykoff—a man of men! Loyal en tout!" Denton swore a deep oath. "If I run against Mustapha Pasha Becker Bey I will call up the past if I have to drag his flimsy character to tatters! He will never get away from me! It may be some low-minded blackmail! Some sad family secret!"

"I'm glad, however, that the ball is delayed! I'll send Arpad off to Budapest, and while he is away with Soltykoff I will await the Countess' disclosure!" He stole Batthyani away from the two bright-eyed tyrants long enough to learn that he was absolutely in the dark. The gay Lieutenant was easily reassured! "The doctor tells me that it is only over-exertion! Magda was always a mercurial nature! We have telegraphed Arpad and the ball is postponed; that's all! We'll get up a rattling hunt for you! There's never a Turk can storm Falkenstein! I think it was only the sheer break-down of the Soltykoff parting! Poor old Serge! He's a rare good fellow!" Bela hastened away to the sweet laughing maids awaiting him!

Nothing is lighter than the heart of youth, and Denton smiled to see the three young people so oblivious of the past and all heedless of the morrow! The soldier fixed his eyes on wooded Lobau with Aspern and Essling masked behind its deadly fringe of graveyard trees! The theatre of Napoleon's most splendid battle passion plays! Away sped the swift yacht, its engines throbbing to the imprisoned steam demon's impulse, gliding down past Fischament, and beautiful Schonau, on beyond Ellend, past Regelsbrunn and the splendid domain of Count Tramer at Petronel.

"The Countess has ordered full speed!" proudly said the captain. "See what the 'Lorelei' is doing! But we don't leave that fellow much!" Denton turned his eyes in a vague uneasiness and saw a gliding shadow stealing along behind them on the swift blue Danube! It was a powerful boat, and it was rushing on like the wild huntsmen's steeds! A dark pursuer!

"Company's boat?" queried the American. The yacht captain lowered his glasses. "That's the 'Sultanieh,' the Ottoman Embassy's boat! She holds the record to Galatz! There! You can see the red flag! Well, she may beat us; she was built on torpedo boat lines, and only fitted with a pleasure deck! She is a wonder for speed!"

"Now I wonder!" growled Denton, as they swept on past the Hütelberg, "if the missing stars of Wien are racing down to the Point du Sérail! Here the Turks turned and gave up forever from the conquest of Europe; here at the Hütelberg! May the devil convoy Mustapha if that is his exit! Hainburg and ruined Rollenstein flitted by, crowning the superb stream where every turn disclosed "some fresher beauty varying round!" The moody American soon forgot all his cares at the merry challenge to the table, for already the March was before them! There, on the hill, the yawning ruins of Theben told of the work of the fierce Frenchmen's petards in the gloomy year of 1809. "We are in Hungary once more! Thank God!" cried Countess Magda, the rose color flushing her fair cheek as she blew a kiss to the distant peaks of the Gernsburg. She was in her own kingdom once more! Love's garden!

The soldier left the merry party, busied now chanting quaint, dreamy old Magyar love songs, and soon stood alone rapt at the lovely scene where the vine clad slopes of the Carpathians rose far above them in the glowing skies! Presburg lay before them there, nestling below the old kingly palace on the Schlossberg. The burnished Danube wound far away, wind-

ing away beyond them like a glittering snake, and far off Karlsburg and Keltsee, nestled under the old feudal keep of Wolfsthal! They had now left Theben far behind, and the fair Countess Magda, sparkling-eyed, cried "Eljen!" in glee, as the old gray turrets of Falkenstein came at last into view, with the little, fluttering flag of the Falkas streaming bravely out on the crystal air!

"Where is our rival?" questioned Denton. The captain pointed down the stream to where a long column of black smoke cast its opaque shadow on the singing river! "Passed us like a flash, as if devil driven!" muttered the crestfallen navigator. "Beasts of Turks! They are dirty dogs, all of them!"

"I am glad that the Countess saw nothing!" rejoined Denton, as the "Lorelei" swung daintily around to her landing at the boat bridge! There was a sudden chorus of feminine shrieks as handsome Arpad Falka, in full hunting panoply, leaped over the narrowed water chasm, and passing his blooming sister, with true brotherly insouciance, tenderly clasped his beautiful mother in his arms! Paul Denton, diplomatically sedate, awaited the placing of the gang plank, and with a general round-robin salutation, then gravely placed his offering of flowers in the dainty gloved hands of Countess Ilma! Their eyes met in silence, and Arpad's voice was the first lifted up! "Hello! What's this? Where's Soltykoff?"

"Off for Odessa, my boy!" quickly responded Fraser Denton, shaking the young officer's hand. "He will wait a couple of days at Budapest to see you! He received the most imperative telegraphic orders!"

"By Jove! See him! I'll see him if I have to swim down! There's only one Serge Soltykoff in the world! Why did you let him go?" Arpad turned to the stately Countess, whose cheeks now wore a richer red than the native roses, blushing near her! Strangely, the Lady of Falkenstein found no ready words to answer and Fraser Denton bit his lip, as he murmured,

"By Jove! She has her little secret—all her own! One woman, one mystery!" he growled, and then looking at the black floating shadow on the silver Danube far below, he hoped the fleet boat had borne it away out of their lives forever! But there were no shadows on the faces of the merry party as they were whisked away to the domain of Falkenstein. Major Denton felt himself just a bit *de trop*! Paul had glided into the wagonette with that young Hebe, Countess Ilma; Bela Batthyani was chattering with the brown-eyed nymph, Aida Denton, and the spirited Arpad was critically surveying the lovely mother, whose fame had gone far and wide as the "Veiled Beauty of Falkenstein!"

"They told me that you were ill! I was even recalled from the hunting scout! But I find you are simply adorable!" the gallant young Magyar cried. "I need rest, Arpad! You know that I only live when back at Falkenstein! Here in the glowing heart of Hungary!" The fair widow's eye met the glances of Fraser Denton in one last appeal.

"What a loyal child of Arpad!" laughed the heir of Falkenstein, "Compliments from my kingly ancestor!" They were a royal picture, this mother and son! "And even her mother love can dissemble!" mused Denton, and so, he mourned one more lost ideal! "What is this invisible barrier between Serge and this lovely mystery?" They were, all gathered on the grand terrace, at Falkenstein before Denton could see the way to shape his plan of action! "Shall I wait for her to speak? Shall I speak first to Arpad? He must see Soltykoff, and as for the rest I must trust to luck, or to fate! What lies before us all now?"

Major Denton eyed the assembled retainers as the graceful Countess paused in their midst, bowing right and left, in a gracious recognition. There was no mistaking old Matthias, the head forester in his gray jerkin, faced with Lincoln green, his silver-mounted belt and buckhorn-hafted hanger! The old retainer

bowed his knee, as he doffed his cap, with its Carpathian eagle plume. As he bent over Magda's slender hand, the old hunter murmured a few broken words! The laughing girls had passed in under the great portal with the Falka arms carved high above them, and Arpad, with his diplomatic guest, had quickly followed. The seniors lingered alone a moment! Turning to her guest, Countess Falka murmured, "Remember! Not a single word!" Then, raising her voice, she cried in her spirited musical accents, "You are welcome to Falkenstein!" The American's eyes followed the Magyar beauty, as her son led her up the grand staircase. He did not fail to note old Matthias, following in dog-like fidelity. Turning his delighted eyes back to the Danube, the whole enchanting panorama of the Little Carpathians lay before him.

The purpled mountains swept far away to the east and the south, with their wooded crests, surmounted by silver-capped Tatra, and the afternoon sun flashed its golden lances on the far Transylvanian peak of Butschelje. The vast old turreted pile of Falkenstein, buttressed upon its gray rocks, was bowered in splendid gardens, sweeping down to the murmuring river there below! A splendid close of tall ilex trees enclosed the plaisance garden, where knight and dame had watched the river so long with love-lit eyes. A noble flight of marble steps led down to the waves, whence the water nixies wooed the shimmering midnight stars! To the left, the Wolf's Glen led up to the mighty crags above them, and far behind the vineyards nestled in the swelling slopes of the rounded hills. Down below them storied old Presburg lay, with its four quartered environs. The Rathhaus, St. John's Chapel, the Martin Cathedral, and the great flagged Batthyani platz silently glowed in the golden flood tide. There were drifting sails, too, gleaming white on the rushing river, where the sound of merry song floated back from the crystal tide, and the far away tinkling herd bells were drowned in the hollow clang

of the joy bells of the home coming! Denton's eye sought out the stern old round tower, where the mad Kinsky had been chained like a beast! As he noted the ivy grown ruin, old Matthias emerged from the sombre richness of the castle hall! He approached the veteran, cap in hand. "I am to show you all the grounds. Herr Major! My lady says that you must accept me as guide! I will wait here until you have broken your fast! I pray you enter!" Denton started, as a huge raven, soaring out from the round tower's gloom, winged its way along, croaking harshly till it was only a black shadow borne on strong pinions, far away down the Danube!

"The old huntsman must tell me the story of the murder and show me the Count's spring! But, has she sealed his lips?"

Major Denton joined the happy circle in the great dining hall, where smoke browned trophies of the dead master's chase still hung! It was the very bower of lingering old romance! Before the huge fireplace, where Gabor Falka's cuirass, helmet and crossed swords still hung—the young chief of the house welcomed his chief guest. The Magyar chasseur costume could not hide the "service" tokens of Arpad Falka's well knit, athletic figure. Tall, bronzed, spare and lithe as a Styrian chamois, his eagle eye, overhanging brow, and air of mingled resolution and bonhomie bespoke the Magyar race! The supple movement, winning voice, and quick, alert movement betrayed the man who danced the Czardas, scaled the Falconberg, tamed the wildest Croatian steed, and flashed into poetry or song with all the headlong abandon of Hungary! A modern Bayard! "Wait! Wait! Major Denton! When I return from Budapest I will show you the Hungarian's whole world, from the Wolf's Peak! I must run down to-morrow to see Soltykoff once again. Who knows but that one of Russia's whirlwind wars may claim him?"

"I will leave Paul here to show you all the musty glories of our old castle. In scanning our old den, you can imagine what Hungary was when we held the whole world at bay here under the Rhaetian Alps! Now, the cup of welcome!" And then, laughingly, Denton drank of the melted gold of the old Tokay, brimming the antique gemmed flagon, which Sobieski had once drained "to Hungary" in the glorious past!

"I must send a letter off to Soltykoff!" gravely said Denton, and it seemed to him as if the silent Countess standing there, with cheeks suddenly paling, moved the trembling lips to frame the word, "Remember!" For her heart was with her absent lover, too!

"Would she call him back?" Major Denton found time for a few words to greet his sturdy diplomatic kinsman, Paul! I will do the ghost chambers and all the picture gallery's glories to-night! I am your 'prey' after dinner! The ladies are tired out and we can then have a 'war talk!' I am under the orders of Matthias now!"

The beautiful châtelaine bowed her head! "I see that you are a loyal subject, Major Denton, and have already learned the soldier's crowning duty—obedience! Come! Arpad, I claim you now!"

"Will she tell him aught?" mused Denton. "Why does she bear her burden alone? Will Arpad carry Serge's life sentence to him?"

"We are going in for some music, Major!" hastily remarked Paul Denton, as Bela Batthyani proudly bore away the younger beauties. "Aida is simply radiant; and it's a waste of time to ask you any family questions! You are as fit as a Derby winner!" Paul Denton at twenty-five was the fellow of his Hungarian host of equal age! His elegant "pekin" garb gave no hint of soldiering, but his clear, bright eye, rounded muscle and splendid brawn told of the old Yale days spent straining the ash and struggling in the olympic battles of the foot ball field! A couple of years of globe trotting, with a few dashes at the elk and big

horn, stray interviews with "ursus ferox," and "bos bison Americanus," had shaken all the nonsense out of him! A decent fortune had enabled Paul to indulge in a brilliant post-graduate course at Berlin, and his later entry into the placid diplomatic life of the American abroad, led him to the feet of that brilliant Magyar demoiselle, Countess Ilma Falka! His sworn comradeship with her brother, Arpad, had easily opened mess and club to him, and, moreover, his official post-office address was more frequently "Presburg" than Vienna, for reasons "not altogether within his own control!" For, Paul was no laggard lover! Fraser Denton had curiously wondered if Paul would bear off as his bride the rarest blossom of the Magyar garden, for gentle Magda Falka as yet knew America only as a peopled waste! The gray-eyed young diplomat spent hours over this "coming international complication" with much artful strategy expended in hastening slowly. His crisp brown locks covered an "old head," as men go, and the waiting game had enabled him to fend off so far all the shoals of proud Grafs and haughty nobles, who wished to quarter the Falka arms in heraldic curtesy. The son of Columbia feared only Countess Magda's pride.

The silver dinner gong had sounded long before Fraser Denton threaded the darkened garden shades on his return! "It is a mountain Paradise, a gallant eyrie, here perched in the Danube barrier!" The American was no wiser than before he went out, for old Matthias only crossed himself and mumbled a prayer when Denton asked for "the Count's spring!" "He can keep all the secrets of time, this loyal old huntsman!" was Denton's admiring comment. The stubborn old huntsman was silent and deaf.

It was easy to discern that Countess Magda ruled there in medieval absolutism, for neither in the night vigil with Paul, nor when Arpad Falka waved a merry adieu from the "Lorelei" next day, was there any reference to the untoward incident of the opera. The

grim Turk was ignored! "Shadows that pass!" muttered Denton, and yet, he noted the gentle decision with which Magda Falka vetoed the presence of the young ladies at the great forest hunting drives! "There is always some sad accident possible!" she murmured, "The lord to the chase, the dame to her place!" laughed the châtelaine. "We will avenge ourselves later at the masked ball!" There was already great spoil of ancient gear unearthed for the grand ball, which was to signalize the bringing home of boar and chamois, wolf and bear! And the whole country side was bidden!

Denton and Paul roved over the castle, and inspected the faded glories of picturesque old Presburg, while the three graces were dispatching Countess Magda's biddings to the Batthyanis, the Trauns, the Schaffgolsch, the Zichys, the Palfys, the Esterhazys, and all the magnates who ruled the March of the Empire.

When Fraser Denton had curiously peered into the gloomy recesses of the raven tower, on the morrow of Arpad's departure for Budapest, he turned to old Matthias, his stalwart cicerone, "I once knew the Kinskys!" he said, "many years ago! Are they of your neighborhood here?"

The American was fairly startled at the convulsion of the old huntsman's stern features! "Name them not! Herr Major! An accursed race! They are all dead, passed away, blotted out! The wolf howls over their cold hearthstone, far away yonder!—Transylvanian devils!—Never name them here! The Kinskys are our foes, wherever the devil drives them! Outcasts, wanderers! They betrayed their own land with the accursed Gorgey! The finger of Death followed them!"

"So the wound still rankles!" mused Denton. "Did Bela really tell me all? Does he know all? There will be surely no Kinsky face at this merry masking in the old Schloss! And yet I have seen the dead

come back! These border feuds are Corsican here, and it is true that the Magyar is the Circassian of Europe! They never forget or forgive!" But, Major Denton threw himself into the merry entertainment of the passing hours! Paul, as volunteer equerry, dragged his relative from kennel to stable, from chalet to where the beaters were now being mustered! "You do the trick as if to the manner born, Paul!" laughed the old soldier. "I must break myself in," replied the astute young diplomat. "Thy people shall be my people, you know!" They were strolling down to greet Arpad, for the returning "Lorelei" was signaled, when the Major absently queried, "What of Arpad's father? Did he die in service?"

"It is a family sorrow, I believe!" lightly replied Paul! "Count Gabor, I'm told, was killed in the Bosnian war, after a most heroic, soldierly career. He was greatly distinguished at Solferino, where a battalion of the white coats died there grimly on the hill, defying a whole French army!" And then the youngster yodled a frantic welcome to the brother of his self-elected bride! "So he knows nothing!" grimly mused Fraser Denton. "What is this old story? Amourette or vendetta?" He was struck with Magda Falka's feverish gayety at regaining her own home! She seemed now to have put away all shadows, and the woman, so pale and broken at Vienna, seemed to shine with a newer life! "Can it be that Arpad brings back Soltykoff?" thought Denton! "Or is he only waiting until Paul has conquered the frosty Austrian pride of caste? Perhaps he will be rewarded later! It's all woman's mystery!"

But, Arpad Falka was alone and his brow was gloomy! He led his elder guest aside! "I must have a talk with you about Soltykoff," he said, giving Denton a letter. "I never saw him so cut up! Perhaps your letter may explain! I begged him to come back with me for the hunt and ball! He says that he is peremptorily ordered to Odessa. There is some new

racket on the Armenian border, or over on the Tashkend road! He has been for years the head of the secret staff, planning the coming Russian advance on Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf! He seems gloomy enough! I tried to get something out of him! He only said that he would first report, as a soldier should, and if there is no war, then throw up his commission and go into retirement on his Ukraine estates! Why, not even my mother's letter would move him! He has written to her that he will come back for the late hunting if he goes 'en retraite'! It can't be money! He is a magnate, immensely rich, and he can have an aide de camp's place with the Emperor at the merest hint! But he is no court dangler! I wonder that he has never married!"

"So you are side-tracked also, my young friend!" mused Fraser Denton! "Everyone but you can see Soltykoff's despairing love for the silent Countess!" He left the young men to join the trinity of waiting beauty on the terrace, and threw himself down on an old rustic bench! Breaking the seal of Serge Soltykoff's letter, he growled in a vain rage, as he ran over the lines. "I must look to this! By God! There is some damned deviltry hatching out! The raven is on the Danube! Oh! for one glimpse of the truth! Dare I warn her? I will watch night and day! If there is a sorrow of to-day, once a shame of the past, how can I force myself into a woman's locked up heart? What could I know that Arpad must not know? Is our old enemy Soltykoff's rival of the past, and the partner of Magda Falka's secret?"

"She must know of this! After the guests are gone I will warn her by carelessly letting her read Soltykoff's letter! Women have a thousand wiles where men only walk the straight path!"

And he again read over the words which brought to him a fresh alarm, "I have made Arpad the bearer of what I would not trust to any one else!" wrote the Russian, "for he knows nothing of my love, my hopes,

my fears! You must write me every day, addressed to Odessa, until I reply! There is some hidden danger lurking near Magda! Do sound Arpad and Bela on the story of the old times! I have already found out that the captain knows little! But his old servants would surely tell him all! You must guard Magda! It is honor alone which makes me go forward! I shall telegraph to you from Odessa! If all is well reply by wire, 'Coast clear.' Now, here's the mystery! I ran against Faröe Moses, the great diamond dealer of Constantinople, at Hungaria. He came up with jewels for the Széchenyi wedding. I knew him of old on the Golden Horn. Our Ambassador, Ignatief, used him as a chief spy there, for Moses has the entrée of all the harems of Istambol! Now, he remembers you very well in Cairo, where he was the chief dragoman and king of the bazaars in your time!

"I cautiously brought up this 'Mustapha Pasha' fellow's name! The old mahogany-colored island Jew scanned me very closely. 'Is he a friend of yours or an enemy?' cautiously said he. 'Look here, Moses!' I answered. 'You may need a good turn for one of your Hebrew guild over at Odessa! I shall soon be Mouravief's second in command there! Tell me the whole truth! He is my enemy!'

"'Then look out for him!' answered Moses, after peering around to see that we were safe. 'Tell your friend Denton to be also on his guard! The Major once stopped him from killing poor little Lord Wood, an English lad at Cairo, in a row over 'the Pozzoni!' This Mustapha is a self-promoted Pasha! Names are nothing to him! He was Waldemar Becker Bey in Egypt! Major Denton will remember him! Spy, pander, gambler and slave girl huckster! He was a renegade from Russia, whither he had drifted from Roumania or Bulgaria.' Now what the devil he is after up here he would not say!

"But the yacht captain told me of a lovely reinforcement for Ismail Pasha's harems of Dolma

Baghtche! 'You are all right, Colonel!' said the timid old Jew trader, 'but, bid Major Denton beware! This Becker Bey is a born Magyar, and he knows every inch of Hungary.' 'His true name?' I queried. 'Ah! That I know not,' said Moses, 'but he is a Magyar. He is an all round spy, and has just run down several loads of women out of Austria for Constantinople! Once beyond the Iron Gate, he is safe! Any woman lured into his hands would be murdered at the first sign of escape! Roumania and Bulgaria are only feeding grounds for these Turkish dogs! It is the shame of Europe!'

"Now, Denton, I have promised Farøe Moses to get him passports for any Hebrew partner he sends under his sign manual to see me! In return Moses will post me at Odessa as to all this wretch's whereabouts. If you find him lurking around Countess Magda shoot him down like a dog! You will save me the trouble, and it may save your own life! Now, dare you, dare I break in upon Countess Magda's proud reserve? You might lose a friend; I might lose the woman who is the whole world to me! Watch, guide and guard! If there is aught suspicious, warn her openly and tell her this whole story! If any strange event occurs, telegraph to me at Odessa! I have already slaked all my youthful ambitions; if love is denied to me, then there is always vengeance! I have not dared to shatter Arpad's faith in his entire knowledge of his mother's heart!"

Major Denton gazed at the clean cut signature, "Serge Soltykoff," a dozen times before he slept that night! Three days of the wild romantic mountain chase brought the old soldier home tired and weary. Yet, he dared not speak to Arpad to alarm lovely Ilma nor to break in upon the stately châtelaine's silent introspection! Only once, at the great hunting feast, the Lady of Falkenstein turned to her guest of honor, "You have not spoken to any one of my fright at the opera?"

Fraser Denton gravely shook his head. "It is well, my friend!" said Countess Magda, throned in her robes of princely state. "It was only my disordered nerves! A mere vision! For the dead do not return! I was only haunted by an old sorrow! And it was a stranger face that brought it back! Here in my mountain home I can laugh at the world! There are stout hearts in Magyar land! And these are all my own, my loving subjects!"

Fraser Denton, walking in his splendid chamber on the morning of the great masked ball, watched with a curious eye the merry groups scattered over lawn and "My Lady's Garden!" The great halls below echoed to the sound of ringing laughter. Groups of gay cavaliers and equipages thronged the splendid park! The American was, however, reminded of his anxious correspondent by a telegram from Odessa signed 'Solytkoff.' He had answered it briefly, and pen in hand, was now busied in framing a letter in answer to the Russian's warnings!

Denton was puzzled! "When we scatter, when Paul goes back to Vienna, when Arpad and Bela rejoin their regiments, and I am called away on my tours, here are these two women without a single man to guide or any cool adviser! There seems to be no way to cut this Gordian knot!" There was a strange uneasy feeling haunting him that the air was fraught with danger!

"Hello, Uncle!" gaily cried Paul Denton, breaking in on the veteran's seclusion. "What are you up to? They miss your presence!" "Only writing to Solytkoff!" said Denton, offering his cigar case. Paul strolled to the window, and then turning suddenly said, "I wonder if he has received his congé! If he would only marry the Countess! But the whole world seems to be at cross purposes!"

Major Denton rose and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "What do you mean, Paul?"

"I would then be free to take Ilma Falka away as

my wife!" The young diplomat was gloomy. "Arpad tells me that Soltykoff has departed finally! And Ilma will not leave her mother alone! We can wait, but the whole thing is at a deadlock! I am not intimate enough with Colonel Soltykoff to broach this! He is as proud and as untamable as Peter the Great himself! You know these headlong Russians!"

"Paul, my boy!" cried the startled veteran! "You can end the whole thing right here on this visit! Soltykoff is at the present wavering as to throwing up his appointment! His heart is here! Now if you will bring Ilma to her mother as your affianced then Arpad will surely sanction it! There will be surely no embarrassment! Then the mother is free to call Serge back! I will post him by telegraph! I see it all now! How blind I have been! Countess Magda would not encourage the Russian until her daughter was first a bride! I have been blind! Speak to Ilma! Speak to her to-night!"

Paul laughed, "You do not know these spirits of fire and flame! Ilma will be bewitched with the dance, the loveliest bacchante, to-night! No! To-morrow! I'll make an early morning tryst with her in the garden, and if I can win her, as you are the head of our family, we will join forces and try to gain Countess Magda's consent! Say nothing to Arpad! I will bring his sister to him! She can win him over at a touch! Then you can at once summon Soltykoff to return if we carry the day! I believe that you are right! Serge is a gallant fellow. He will win, especially if he would offer to retire and let Countess Magda have her summers here at Falkenstein. She would have her old realm around her. The loss of Ilma would not be a serious one, as I am soon to be First Secretary and good for another four years at Vienna! Now, to-morrow morning you take Arpad away on a long ride and give me the whole morning alone in the garden with Ilma! The guests will not leave us until the afternoon!" Paul was radiant and confident!

"Success, my boy! Success to you!" cried the happy soldier. This will cut the Gordian knot and Countess Magda will have a noble partner for life!"

Fraser Denton was the lightest hearted black domino of the motley crowd of maskers when the great Schloss blazed out with lights that night! Two hundred revellers thronged the vast halls and the mirrors reflected under the glow of the wax sconces, blushing beauty and manly bravery in wild attire, in medieval armor, or clad in Renaissance riches in courtly guise. Countess Magda, as Anne of Austria, was the queen of the night. An Esterhazy followed her as a sumptuous Buckingham; Arpad, a glorious Andreas Hofer, rivaled that princely caballero, Paul Denton! Bela Batthyani was a dashing Don Carlos, and he chivalrously guarded Aida Denton, who as the Bohemian girl, was a piquant foil to the crowning vision of loveliness, Ilma Falka as Lurline!

There is no wailing music as sweet as the witching waltzes of the Tziganes, no dancers lighter of foot than the courtly Magyars. Beauty born of murmuring sound thrilled in the faces of the impassioned merry-makers! Wafted perfumes, happy laughter, the ringing of silver and crystal, the merry sounds borne on the love laden atmosphere, all made up a witching dream of ecstatic gayety!

Fraser Denton, gazing down on the splendid scene from the grand picture gallery, was dreaming of the double wedding festival to come! He had sent a letter, artful in its veiled consolation, to the ardent Russian! "All's well that ends well! To-morrow will turn the golden key!" he murmured. The ball was now at its culmination of merry abandon! Suddenly a hand clasped his own roughly! He started! It was Count Arpad, still clad in his Tyrolian bravery. "Quick! Quick! The very man! Take this pistol! Come! Some fellow, some low intruder has stolen into the house, probably for robbery! He has blundered clumsily into my father's rooms! They have been locked

ap ever since his death! Now guard this portal! Stop any one, even at the risk of life! Old Matthias saw him sneak out of the hall when the signal to unmask was given! The other door was left open to allow the rooms to be illuminated! I'll go in at the other end! Never mind me! I'm armed! And, Matthias watches the stair below! He tracked the stranger there!" The merry music of the dancers was wafted up from below, as Fraser Denton waited breathless, with the heavy army revolver cocked and at a ready! There was no sound within the closed door! But soon, Arpad Fal-ka's springing feet sounded returning down the long hall! He then led the astonished American into the dimly lighted, deserted chambers! "Gone! Tricked!" he gasped! "See that, Major Denton!" he said gravely, pointing to a little turret door still standing open! The night air drew in chill and fresh through the narrow aperature. "That door was known only to my father! Some one has been here for a sinister purpose! Some scoundrel who has mingled with the guests! The fellow who prepared that way of escape knew long years ago of its existence! Let this be your secret and mine! I must not alarm my mother! Here! What's this?" The young Count then stooped and picked up a red fez!*

CHAPTER III.

LOST COUNTESS ILMA!—PAUL DENTON'S LIFE QUEST!—FAROE MOSES' FRIEND ON THE TURKISH YACHT—TOO LATE!

While the startled men eyed each other, the flourishes of the grand Magyar national hymn called the revelers below to the banquet. For all masks were off and the sound of merry challenges rang out on the vibrant air! "I must go!" cried Arpad. "Keep this a secret!

*Fez, a red Turkish cap.

I dare not excite my mother! Doctor Eschenbach wrote me from Wien that her heart action was greatly enfeebled! I must lead the supper march! My mother waits for me. I will have Matthias post two well armed men at every entrance of the Schloss! Come up to my rooms when the ball breaks up!"

The young Count locked the only door which had never been opened since the murdered Count Gabor lay there, slain in his prime! The old head yager stood by mutely and shuddered as the rusted key creaked in the old lock! Fraser Denton gazed at the old man in silence as Arpad hastily communed in the Magyar tongue with the ober forester.

"Now, come on, Denton!" said Arpad, as he sprang down the rear staircase. But Matthias laid his heavy hand on Denton's arm! He whispered "Come back to me! You saw the raven leave the Round Tower! It is a sign of ill omen! The dead came back to-night!" Denton held the fez in his right hand. He held it up, "Do you know this?" he said. The old man started back! "Yes! There was a Turk, who changed his garb several times! The Black Mask! Go you! I will now search the rear passage! But come back to me here! For there has been a man hidden in the Round Tower, and he knew all the secrets of the Schloss!"

"He! Who? Speak?" demanded Fraser Denton, as the old man moved away. "The dead Kinsky! He alone knew! For, Count Gabor was a secret conspirator, and Kinsky always led those whose heads might fall in here at night! The rising failed after the Count's death, for the Government had the secret plans! I will search the passage now!"

Fraser Denton slowly descended the stair and stood a moment at the door of the banquet hall, gazing on the blushing loveliness there and all the Magyar chivalry assembled around the lovely Magda.

"I must tell Arpad to-morrow! He must warn his mother. The Schloss must be guarded! For now, I know why Kinsky fled to Russia! The spy sold his

master to the Austrian! He would have enjoyed the Countess and her wealth would have been his own, when Austria's vengeance struck! The noble Steplen Sczéchényi died a prison starved maniac! Count Louis Batthyani's last cry, "Eljen à haza!" was stilled by the bullets of the firing platoon of Haynau! But Kinsky's passion could not wait! And so, murder saved the Austrian hangman his rope! The wild libertine, chased out from Russia after his second sale of masters, bloomed out as Waldemar Becker Bey, the Egyptian officer! It is he! Now rich, powerful, thirsting for revenge, he comes back as Mustapha Pasha to plot against the woman who once repulsed him! Yes! I will take Arpad to the forest while Paul seeks his fate at Ilma's hands! Shall I urge Soltykoff to come back? The daughter wedded, and in Paul's sturdy keeping, the mother must at once find a protector in the princely Russian! For in Moscow's palaces Mustapha's schemes will be baffled forever! The renegade would never dare to face the ban which drove him from Russia, and the secret police will watch this scoundrel's every movement! Soltykoff's strong arm is needed here now. I will invite him to come on at all hazards! For the fates must not be tempted!

"Arpad shall know all! He must now divide his mother's fears!" and, around the old soldier, the light laughter of love swelled in a happy chorus! The grave American sat moodily at the feast, where bright eyes challenged him and love and laughter reigned! It was easy for him to leave the hall after a last meaning glance at Arpad, gallantly ruling the midnight feast! Superb in her loveliness there, Countess Magda shone among her patrician guests, the queen of a summer night! Ilma's dark eyes flashed out a greeting over the jeweled cup, and Aida Denton forgot the passing of her father in the murmured entreaties of Bela Batthyani! They were of one mind! The night breeze scarcely moved the trembling leaves, the river shone blue under the twinkling stars, and great fantastic black

shadows quivered on the velvet shaven lawn, as Fraser Denton followed old Matthias out into the crisp night. A little door, hidden behind the projecting angle of a tower, soon admitted the two men, and Matthias' lantern dimly lit up the winding stair, not a yard wide, hidden from sight in the projecting masonry of the great western tower of the grand portal.

Matthias halted in a circular grotto through which the sinister, unbidden guest had fled from the dead Count's private apartments! He flashed his lantern around and then grunted as he tripped over several cast off garments! "The scoundrel used several disguises!" cried Denton, as he held up a Capuchin's robe, then a great black domino, and marveled at a common forester's suit, as well as a Magyar peasant costume. "What the devil would he do with these last?" grumbled Denton. They were travel stained and soiled! The floor was covered with half burned matches and Denton stooped and picked up an empty paper case. It was marked "Osmanli Tabac-Regie—Constantinople." There was a rough boat cloak lying under their feet, as if it had been thrown down in flight! The men stood there in wonder!

"Some one has been hiding here!" stoutly said old Matthias, as he held up a leathern wallet! There was bread and meat still therein and a half emptied brandy flask. "Now, I know why the Round Tower shows that some wanderer had nested there recently. This fellow watched us from there by day and hid here at night! And these dresses would do for the country villages, or the river! God protect our noble mistress!" The old forester's voice sounded hollow in the silent vault! Fraser Denton stood there, pistol in hand. "He might come back and be trapped here!" "Ah! No! He is too shy a bird! We will hear no more till he is ready to strike again! After the Countess is left alone!" "Matthias!" Denton faced the old servitor as he spoke, "does the young Count know that his father conspired against the Hapsburgs?"

The old man solemnly said "No! Only the Count, I and Kinsky knew! The Countess was a simple girl and easily hoodwinked! The secret gatherings were held here, the guests then were masked later as gentlemen hunters! I am the last survivor!" "And who was Kinsky?" Denton's voice trembled in eagerness. "He was the Adjutant of Gabor Falka's Honved Regiment, and it was his hand that struck the dead man at the Count's spring!"

"Now I must go! Hear me!" cried Denton. "Keep your lips sealed as to the past, till I bid you speak! But, sleep not! Have the armed men posted at every door of the Schloss, and you must guard this door yourself! Count Arpad alone must know of what we have found! Leave all here just as we found it!"

The gray-headed forester bowed assent! "I will sleep in front of this door! My son, the under forester, alone shall be with me! I wait for you and the Count Arpad!" and the old man looked to his pistol and hunting sword.

"Good!" cried Denton, as he stepped out in the night, pistol in hand! But as his left hand clutched the emptied cigarette packet, he muttered, "Strange that Soltykoff and I should have to run down Walde-mar Becker Bey! I must telegraph to McIvor Pasha at Constantinople! He must know of this at once!"

The lights were dim in the great banquet hall, but graceful shadows still flitted across the casements of the long line of guest chambers above! The Tzigane music was mute, and serf and lord, maid and patrician beauty were alike forgetting the cares or raptures of this night of nights! Only from below, in the servants' hall, rang out the murmured echo of the feast of the night!

"Go the rounds, Matthias! Watch and sleep not!" said the American veteran.

"I guard my dear lady's life with my own!" solemnly answered the old henchman; and so the masked ball was over, the splendid pageant of a happy night!

Arpad Falka's orderly waited in the vaulted grand corridor for the American. "This way, my lord!" he whispered. "The Count expects you!" Denton sighed as he mounted the stair! He had seen the roofs of the old Diet Hall of Hungary sparkling there below, while above the crescent moon hung over the ruin where St. Stephen had worn the purple mantle, and the crown of Sylvester II. Nine hundred and ninety years had rolled by, and yet the restless Magyar heart still plotted against Fate's stern decrees! "The dead Count a rebel! Was Kinsky not an Austrian mouchard? Did he strike for revenge, that outraged Love had foiled his plot to betray Gabor Falka to the Austrian hangman, and enjoy wife and the confiscated estates?"

The resolute American had already decided upon his course, when he noiselessly entered Arpad's private rooms.

"He must never know! Let him only think the past tragedy was the result of a blood feud! The great conspiracy is dead forever, for Austria's Emperor is now Hungary's anointed and lawful king, and the Magyar land is restored to her autonomy! I will only hasten Paul's marriage and Soltykoff's return! Till then, Arpad must guard his mother with the eye of the Carpathian eagle!"

The two men were alone! Arpad strode up and down as Major Denton described the discoveries of the grotto! "What do you make of it all?" said the American. The young man threw himself into a chair. "Thank God! My mother knows nothing! I will have the Schloss doubly guarded till the guests depart! Then a thorough search must be made of the whole domain! We will examine every nook of the hundred old lumber rooms of the Schloss! Our Magyar wits are sharp! If I find any scoundrel lurking here I will throw his carcass to our hounds! Here I am master! My voice is law!"

"Arpad!" said the American, "have you any blood feud? Any dangerous intrigue? Is there any danger

menacing your mother? Has she said aught to you since her return? Anything to alarm you?" Denton bid for the young Count's confidence. "Not a word!" cried Falka. "I have no enemies on my track! There are no local quarrels! I fear that this may be some device of the river bandits to linger and steal my mother's jewels, or perchance, in secret, to rob the plate vaults! I might leave an easy opening for this fellow to return! I could have the outer secret door watched! The inner one he has burst loose! Let us meet early to-morrow! You and I will take a turn in the wald and talk it over! I will see Matthias and leave him to watch in the grotto while we are away! I will station his son on watch in the closed up rooms! These men are as mute as the werewolf! We own them, body and soul! I do not wish to alarm my mother! Remember, the doctor's warning! But when the guests are gone I will confer guardedly with her! If this menaces any one, it is my mother! And she never leaves her own apartments till after I have visited her rooms! So to-morrow morning we will set our trap! The fez, of course, was just a bit of disguise! This scoundrel must have a thorough knowledge of the ground, and has probably some confederates! For neither Matthias nor I ever dreamed that the secret door was known to others!"

Count Arpad himself conducted Major Denton back to his rooms! The men clasped hands in parting. "All is safe for the night, and to-morrow night, I will have concealed watchers in the shrubbery!" Arpad's last word was, "This is for you and I alone as yet! Not a word to Bela! To any one! There is no present danger!"

Major Denton gazed after the proud young noble as he disappeared. A horrible misgiving suddenly filled his mind. "Countess Magda is but a woman! Has she stooped to disgrace? Is there some old connection, some mad intrigue that she dare not own to her princely heirs? Is there a desperate lover who has

followed her here? The discovery of the secret passage, the unbidden guest's presence at the ball! Was it the freak of some one of the mad gallants of a land where blood is molten fire? Was Soltykoff's long pressed suit barred by a deadly impediment?" The generous blood surged back to his heart. "No! I will risk my life on her honor!" mused Denton. "Magda Falka wears no mask! And to her, I will speak! Thank God! Paul will know his fate before we return! Then the *éclaircissement*! Arpad and the Countess consenting, I will tell all to Magda and she, Arpad and myself must guard the future! Yes! It is the golden key! Ilma's 'yes' will make us relatives to be! And so Paul, sly dog, stole away and has gladly made his tryst! It will be all over when we return!"

Yet for all his sage conclusions, Fraser Denton tossed uneasily on his couch. He found himself bolt upright for once, for he had sprung from his couch! It seemed to him that the tall Turk, he of the opera, the man of the Stefans Keller, the fez wearer of the *Franzeñs brücke*, was stealing upon him in the silent night! The veteran grasped his ready pistol!

"I am getting old!" muttered Denton, as he lay down again. He was ashamed to be startled at the vague shadows of the night or conjured up visions of a tired brain, for he had sat his horse unmoved while the shells of the Louisiana Light Artillery duplicated around him the havoc of his own ringing guns! A case of "give and take" to the bitter death!

The old soldier was astir long before any other guest! The morning mists still veiled the Carpathians and hung over the great hill where the ruined palace spoke of other days! The household in the inverse order of rank moved around the old Schloss, jaded and heavy of eyes. To Fraser Denton's secret delight as he entered the breakfast hall, where Arpad Falka awaited him, Paul Denton joined them for a cup of coffee! "Whither away?" merrily challenged the host! "I am off for a freshener, a morning walk!" said the

diplomatist, telegraphing his "All's well" to his uncle! "Let us take a turn on the road, Major?" answered Arpad, with affected carelessness! Join me at the stables! I'll get a pair of ponies out!"

As the American veteran sauntered out he paused at the great portal to light his cigar. There was old Matthias ready to greet him! "I have seen the Count!" the sturdy old man said. "To-night we will catch him, or when he comes again! See! Here are many good places to hide our watchers here!"

Denton eyed the protecting shrubbery and noted Paul striding off over the lawn with upturned glances at Countess Ilma's windows! The keen-eyed old soldier caught the glimpse of a fluttering signal there, for love's signal was a kerchief which was waved, the very oriflamme of love and hope!

"I am not needed here!" laughed the Major, as he wandered away to where a smart wagonette was awaiting him at the stables. Away up the Wolf's Glen, under the spreading forest branches, fragrant in the scented morning, the wild Croatian steeds sprang away! The black cock whirled across their pathway and the shy red deer bounded out of the copses with elastic strides! Blue sapphire skies domed over the far purpled mountains, and fleecy pearl clouds parted in the golden glories of the coming day! The friends were soon deep in every consideration of the unwelcome nocturnal visit! Denton warily guarded his conclusions, mentally rejoicing. "This afternoon I will tell them all! For they must both know now, mother and son!" The clouds had vanished from the gallant Hungarian's brow. "It may have been only some mean marauder! Even a kitchen intrigue! You know this great estate needs a firm hand! I am an absentee and my mother's graceful hand is very light!" He sought manfully to reassure himself! But, Fraser Denton sighed heavily!

"Perhaps an interrupted love masquerade of some one of your gay guests!" smiled Denton, whose heart

was light, knowing that Paul was keeping Ilma's tryst! "Could Arpad really be so long deceived?"

"No! Denton! It was more serious!" answered Arpad. "The man's disguises for inside and outside work would rather hint at an attempted robbery of my mother's famous jewels! For the Sczechenyi's, the Batthyanis and the Falkas were once of almost regal splendor of living! A sly maid, some plotting steward, perhaps! Well, we will see! Here's for home! It's nearly eleven, and the great stirrup cup bout awaits us! The guests will be moving!" The flying steeds were suddenly drawn up, as Paul Denton's lithe form was seen strutting along the road a half mile from the old Schloss, as they neared the sparkling river! It's swift current bore along sloop and shallop, with rushing steam launches and long lines of towed barges, and now from the passing pleasure boats merry music was wafted ashore! All nature seemed to laugh in the summer sunshine!

"Jump in, Paul!" cried the Count. "We are due for the déjeuner soon!" And the Major smiled as he saw the light of happiness in the young athlete's eyes! Denton, minor, had easily vaulted into the wagon. His triumphant eyes told the story, and the Major telegraphed back his congratulations! "It's a rare morning!" said the gleeful Paul. "A morning I will never forget! Your stronghold here is an earthly Paradise, Arpad!" "There's no land like it, this Danube country! 'Hearts so true, eyes so blue!'" sang the young chief as he swung the smoking team up to the great arched doorway, where the flower of Magyar land was gathered around Countess Magda on the great terrace! The wanderers were waited for! Arpad sprang from the wagonette, and, doffing his hunter's bonnet, bent over his mother's slender hand! "Welcome Madre mia!" he laughed. "Pardon your runaways!" The Major and Paul had hardly finished their greeting when Countess Magda turned her eyes anxiously upon

Arpad! She spoke with some little concern in her eager voice.

"Where is Ilma? Did she not ride with you?" Paul Denton's glances were suddenly fixed upon a railway train rushing along the sculptured shores of the farther river bank! His crimsoned face told its story to Fraser Denton alone! The lovely, glowing girl had fled away to her rooms to hide her secret happiness, until it could be told on a mother's breast! The veiled secret of a first love! Paul was silent!

"The Major and I have had a run up the road! We picked up Paul! I have not seen Ilma yet!" said Arpad, as a steward approached the Countess, bowing low.

"I saw the Graf in go down through the garden to the boat house by the river an hour ago, your excellency!" said the retainer.

"Please summon the Countess! Waldeck!" said the stately châtelaine, and then, preceding her son, she passed on into the assembly room, followed by laughing Aida Denton, who had found time to whisper to her soldier father her own morning greetings.

"Such a happy night! The masked ball was simply exquisite!" The brown-eyed American had stolen a glance at guilty Bela Batthyani, who had spoken the night before! But, Fraser Denton was obtuse! His mind was still full of the discovery in the grotto!

In the ceremonial salutations of the gathering guests no one noticed the return of the steward, who simply said, "Excellence! I can not find Graf in Ilma! She must have returned!"

Arpad Falka then left his mother's side and bounded up to the beautiful boudoir of his truant sister. "Ilma!" he called! "We are all waiting!" and a vague misgiving chilled his heart, as the Magyar maid curtsied low! "Her excellency has not returned since she left the Schloss for her morning walk! She must be still down by the river!"

In an hour the alarm bell was pealing out wildly

from the old turret of the Schloss! There were fierce-eyed riders spurring along the forest paths. The villagers summoned by the frightened attendants were sweeping along through coppice and grove, and anxious crowds searched every nook of the river's caverned banks! No sign! The Countess was missing! The guests who came in gladness were departing without ceremony, save the eager cavaliers who were excitedly urging on the search for lost Countess Falka! And still, no tokens!

In her darkened chambers of state Magda Falka lay feebly breathing, her face pale and haggard on its silken pillows! By her side, the frightened Aida Denton watched the flickering of the fluttering tide of life! The grave-faced attendants cast anxious glances at the bevy of physicians who had been brought up from Presburg at a life and death speed! There were great ladies clustered in silent knots, who awaited the first news of the search parties. The river! Ah! the dangerous river! But, on the track of the missing girl, Arpad Falka, with Batthyani, the Major, and the half-demented Paul were madly urging along the excited seekers! Not a sign of the vanished beauty! Not a trace of the proudest heiress of the Danube! In vain, Paul Denton tried to make Arpad Falka listen to his story! "Hasten! Hasten!" was the brother's cry. "We must find her, dead or alive! Ilma! My Ilma!" Even cool Fraser Denton could not succeed in holding Arpad back! It was Bela Batthyani who rode like a demon to Presburg to summon the river police, and to warn all the authorities of the nearest towns! And far and near the rumor of a mysterious tragedy ran on, while Fraser Denton beat his breast, in his vain rage! "My God! I thought only of the mother! And this vengeance has stricken the innocent child! The Turk! Has he murdered her?"

He called up Batthyani, as he rode back on his exhausted steed, and in a few words imparted to him one awful growing fear! "She has been carried off! Down

the river!" For, an awful possible vengeance now came to his mind!

Batthyani bade him speak! And then, vaulting on a fresh steed, he rode away to the telegraph office! "There is but one hope—to use the Imperial power at the Iron Gates, and search everything passing on the river! I will telegraph to the minister of justice at Vienna to send his orders to all our frontiers and to dispatch a squad of his best men here! It is horrible! horrible!"

The frowning buttressed mountains overhanging the Danube threw their gloomy funereal shadows on the blue flood below, and the owl called from the Wolf's Glen, before the last straggling searchers returned! There was not a sign of a struggle at the boat house! Not a stray token of the vanished heiress! Fraser Denton awaited the last conference of the household before his departure from Falkenstein. The veteran had acted with a quick decision! "This sweeps away the last obstacle! Pride has no place here!" So in this thought he had telegraphed to Colonel Soltykoff, by way of Lemberg to Odessa.

"That will bring him to the Golden Horn at once!" muttered Denton, as he scanned the words:

"Countess Ilma kidnapped. Meet me at Constantinople. I go to-night via Budapest. See Faröe Moses as to our old acquaintance. Bela stays here in charge."

It was but four hours before Denton's heart leaped up at the words of the gallant Russian's answer.

"Have six months leave. Meet me Russian Embassy, Istambol. Sail to-morrow steamer 'Princess Olga.'"

"It is like Serge! He may earn his heart's reward after all! Now, for Arpad, Paul and a plan!"

The telegraph had summoned Paul Denton's widowed mother from Vienna, under the escort of Doctor Eschenbach, who was hastening to the side of the prostrated Lady of Falkenstein! When Arpad Falka slowly left his mother's room on his return, his face

had aged ten years! In his own room he gazed over the table at Major Denton, Batthyani and the distracted Paul.

"We must have a plan, some plan of action!" hoarsely said the young noble, whose trembling voice and bloodshot eyes betrayed his helpless rage. "I shall hold Eschenbach responsible for my mother! The Schloss will be garrisoned by ten men of my own regiment. I have already my Colonel's leave for three months! The Imperial Minister begs me to come to Vienna to confer, and promises the whole secret forces of the Empire! How shall we go to work?" They were silent till Fraser Denton spoke!

"See here! Arpad! You must see the Minister and have a full conference with Countess Magda before you start! Let Paul go to Vienna with you! Bela stay here in charge! Granting there has been no accident it would be futile for any one to try and hide Ilma Falka in Hungary, or to move to Germany, Italy, Switzerland or Russia with her! There is but one open road, down the Danube to the Principalities, or," he groaned, "to Turkey!" "Now, Soltykoff waits me at Constantinople before I can arrive. I may detain McIvor Pasha there! I have telegraphed to the British Embassy. I will go to Buda by boat, and down the river to Galatz and Kustendje! From there I will take the steamer to Constantinople and join Soltykoff at the Russian Embassy in Constantinople! I will have a Roumanian visa to my passport!

"You can come with Paul along the railroad to Constantinople and go direct to the Austrian Embassy. In this way we will have two search parties! We will search thus the railroad and the river!"

"Your plan is the right one, Denton!" quickly said Arpad Falka! "I will give you Matthias' son, Janos, who was my yager in my orient tour two years ago, and every Austrian consul will have a cipher dispatch to aid you! I will bring a secret service agent on from

Vienna and at Constantinople, our Ambassador can use his cipher. Can you go with me, Paul?"

The young American leaped to his feet! "I have nothing to live for but to find her! I have telegraphed my application for leave to our Minister, with a conditional resignation! For, Arpad, we are brothers now! When your sister left the ball last night she had promised to be mine for life! She was to meet you this very day to beg you to go with her to your mother and to plead for me! I may not win her hand, but this is my life quest! To find the woman I love, I swear that I will follow it to the death!"

Arpad Falka's head was bowed and the tears streamed through his clenched hands! "You did not tell me, Paul!" he sobbed. "Poor darling!" cried Paul. "She would have tried her gentle arts on you alone! I left her in the garden waiting for you, to steal upon your confidence before her mother's eyes should read the secret!"

"Brothers forever!" cried Arpad! "Let us be up and doing!" He turned to Bela, "What think you, Bela?" "It is the only plan to separate now and fight your hidden enemy later, Arpad!" The young officer's face grew strangely pale. "There is but one who can now give us the clue we seek! Before you go on your way your mother must tell you all! We can have no secrets between us four! I am your kinsman! Bid her tell you of her last days in Vienna! She would have spared you! For I know now she thought the blow would fall on herself alone! But it was this innocent white-souled child who has been carried off to slake some damnable revenge! It is too horrible! God help us all!"

"Paul!" cried the young Count! "Let us make ready! We can return from Vienna to-morrow night, and then I will speak to my mother! Eschenbach will be here! I will take Matthias with us and to-morrow night we will take the midnight train, following down Major Denton!" cried the agonized brother. "Let me

have a dispatch from you at the police bureau of each stopping place, on the Grand Oriental train. Bela will answer your dispatches here, and send all to the Russian Embassy at Constantinople.

One half hour of fatherly commune with his motherless child steeled Fraser Denton to go out on his forlorn hope expedition. The girl who clung to her father's neck trembled at the loneliness of the Schloss. "If there should be more villainy attempted!" she murmured, hiding in her father's bosom. "Ah! My dearest!" cried the veteran, "the troops are already posted around the chateau, and an armed yager rides every path on the estate! A lieutenant and ten men of Arpad's own company will be stationed here until we return with Ilma, alive—or—"

The sentence was not finished, for the old soldier broke down. He dared not yet tell any one but Soltykoff of the hideous fate he feared for the golden-haired patrician with the midnight eyes! There were a score of gruesome tales of the past which painted horrors unspeakable before the soldier's mental vision! One burning desire possessed Fraser Denton's heart! To hound Mustapha Pasha to his lair! To bring him to bay! To see the renegade's corpse trampled under his feet!

In the night, as the steam launch sped away, he strained his eyes to see Arpad, Bela and Paul there at the landing following the first one off to the rescue! Beside him the young forester stood, brave and alert, with gleaming eyes seeking to read, in the rippling waters boiling in their wake, the story of that blind trail on the Danube! Fraser Denton's first goal was Budapest!

"If 'Faröe Moses' should be still at the 'Hungaria' I may learn news of the 'Sultanieh!' Perhaps Soltykoff and I may run the beast to bay before Arpad can reach Istambol!" The soldier saw Schloss Falkenstein fade behind him in the night! The September air was crisp and cool upon the river! Lights burned in happy

homes far above and below him! The scattered river towns gleamed in lines of light, far behind the Schloss was left with the picket fires of the Honveds gleaming around it, red flashes in the forest shades! On cliff and lofty point a single ray showed where the peasants' hut clung to the mountain side! Humble happiness! "Happiness, perhaps, in the cottage, with heart-break in the high hall! The bitter way of the world!" mused Denton.

The tall soldier paced the deck as the launch leaped along! "It is a seven hours' trip, Herr Major, to Buda!" said the captain. "I will do it in five if we do not break down!" and so along the crystal flood, Fraser Denton carried his burden of horrible misgivings to the possibility of an awful realization!

He had counted up the chances of success, and his heart sickened at the thought of the odds against them!

"Ransom! Impossible!" he mused. "Every Magyar heart would be steeled to tear the negotiators to shreds of mangled flesh! What good would this girl's death avail to any one? It would not bring wealth or succession to any secret enemy! She can not be long concealed in continental Europe; her singular loveliness would betray her! 'Mistress of all the languages, a word would bring a fortune to the nearest stranger who would help her!' And again, the phantom of some baffled intriguer, seeking revenge for an olden slight, returned! 'Would any one dare to try to sway the mother by menacing the child? To what end?'" As the launch followed the path of the "Sultanieh," the warning of Faröe Moses came back to affright the American father. "Once beyond the Iron Gates he is safe! 'Roumania and Bulgaria are only feeding grounds for these Turkish dogs!'"

Straining his eyes to see the Blocksberg rise over the divided city, Denton dared not ask himself, "Has the spoiler passed the Iron Gate?" and the fleet "Sultanieh had two days' start now!"

"What are your orders, Herr Major?" said the

launch captain as the Citadel of Ofen shone out, with its red sally port lamps blazing far above them on the grim hill so often slaked with Turkish, German, Austrian and Magyar blood! The old fortress hovered there, the seal of Hungary's honor, the brand of Gorghey's eternal shame! Denton's ready mind was made up on his movements now!

"Can you run me down to the Iron Gates? I wish only to stop here for an hour!" earnestly replied the American.

"Yes! But we must wait till morning for fuel! We cannot get away before nine o'clock. It will take two hours to coal!" the captain sadly said. "The river boat leaves at eight, but, we are faster! It is the best I can do!"

"My God! It is a life and death matter, captain!" groaned Denton, as the boat swung into the eddies of the ferry landing of Pesth! He grasped the sailor in an eager hand clutch, and his prayer for haste was broken off as both were thrown violently on the deck! The steamer drifted helplessly against the bank! Dusky forms sprang out of the ferry sheds with wild cries as the captain sprang away!

When the hubbub was over, Denton realized a crowning misfortune! A floating log caught in the screw had snapped off the main shaft! Helpless now! The first ominous misfortune! With a soldier's quick decision, he cried, "Throw off all our effects, Janos! Wait here in the ferry house! We must take the morning boat!" and then he groaned, "A whole night lost! The devil fights for his own!"

"Herr Major Denton!" said a tall stranger at his elbow. "I have a carriage here! I am the Chief of Police! I have orders!" he whispered, "from the Ministerium at Wien to aid you in all! It is now half past two! What would you?" The soldierly official added, "I will see the boat taken care of! I have Count Arpad's orders to use *carte blanche*!"

"Drive me to the Hungaria Hotel!" cried the ex-

cited Denton! "Do you know if Farøe Moses is yet there, the millionaire jewel merchant of Constantinople?"

"Yes!" answered the chief. "His passports are still at the office, but already visad for a return. He leaves for Belgrade to wait on the Princess Esmé, who is there under treatment of the medical faculty. "Thank God!" cried Denton! "Has the 'Sultanieh' returned here?" "Not since she passed below a few days ago," said the chief, as they entered the carriage. "The Austrian authorities pass her under diplomatic courtesy, as she always flies the legation flag! And they are mean smugglers, those Turks!"

Denton sprang out at the grand entrance of the Hungaria. "Please have the carriage wait for me! I would rather not have you go with me! I do not know how far I can trust to this Farøe Moses! For his fortune is under Moslem rule, and, many a man's heart is in his purse!"

"I will await you at the ferry landing!" said the chief. "Can you get me a boat to run to the Iron Gate?" said the discouraged American. "Alas! Not to-night, our Budapest river men are sleepy heads! The morning boat at eight lands you in Belgrade in twenty-three hours, and is a dozen times more powerful than any yacht!"

"Where does your frontier end?" demanded Denton. "At Orsova, below the Iron Gates!" was the reply! "All hope is lost!" cried Denton! "But you can telegraph now and find out where the 'Sultanieh' is!" The chief bowed and sprang into the carriage.

A sleepy head porter roused up, grumbled as he led the tired American to the rooms of Farøe Moses, the great Dragoman jeweller! In the broad hall a great nubian negro lay asleep on a rug before the Hebrew jewel vender's door! He sprang up, and after a brief parley, grumblingly admitted Denton to where the astonished Moses stood, roused and shaking in fear! The mahogany-colored face of the old Farøe

islander relaxed into a happy grin as he shuffled forward, casing his gaunt form in a flowing gown!

"Ah! Denton Kaimarkan! My old, old friend! You here! What has happened?" He pressed the soldier's hand to his lips, his forehead and his heart! "Speak! Can I do aught for you?"

"When have you seen that renegade Becker Bey?" said Denton, waving the attendants out of the room. "Has he attacked you? I feared his deviltry! He has been hanging around here! I told Soltykoff!"

"Cease! Tell me, where is he?" cried Denton; he easily saw that the Jew was honest! For, fear made him so! The Austrian police have sharp fangs! Farøe Moses trembled, and stroked his gray beard. "God of Jacob! You are the same, always so impetuous! Mustapha Pasha, as he calls himself, came up here with the Princess Esmé, who visited Vienna incognito to see the great doctors, and went back to Belgrade a week ago! But, I always feared Becker. He brought the 'Sultanieh' back to Mahacs, three days ago, and has visited several river towns in the yacht's steam launch! He forced me to give him secret letters to all the Jewish money lenders as far as Presburg! I was here with some rich goods for the 'Sczechenyis.' Becker has power; I am a stranger, and he has the Sultan's firman, Khedive Ismail's signet ring, and the Embassy at Vienna has secretly helped him in all his schemes! Thank God, he is gone! Avoid him! He hates you! He spoke your name with curses! He saw you at Vienna with our old friend, McIvor!"

"I must find him!" sternly cried Denton, his eyes flashing! "By the God of my fathers! Seek him not!" begged Moses. "He is all powerful in Servia, Roumania and Bulgaria! He is chief of the secret harem service, and his European birth and knowledge of languages aid his deviltry! The river is one nest of cut-throats from Semlin to the Three Mouths, and he has some dark designs! He sent for me to go down to Mohacs! I went down by train! He threatened me

with breaking off my business with the Sczechenyis! I went to him on the 'Sultanieh!' He forced me to tell him where McIvor Pasha was voyaging, if Soltykoff had gone from Buda, and he demanded also to know all of your residence at Vienna! I leave to-morrow night! I fear this devil! I have taken all my monies in London drafts and I shall take the train to Constantinople! I will not leave the oriental express for an instant! But, I will warn Soltykoff at once! If I have trouble at Istambol, Soltykoff has promised to give me refuge on a Russian steamer and take me to Odessa by private permission of the Russian secret service! Becker is all powerful at Dolman Baghtché, for Turkey, England and Russia are all watching old Ismail! Even the French fee Becker, for he is Minister of Pleasures to Abdul Hamid, to Ismail and even to the Shah of Persia! Beware! There is death on his track! Go not alone to Constantinople!"

Denton sprang up. "Swear to me, Faröe Moses that you will go direct to Soltykoff at the Russian Embassy! Meet me there! I go down the river! I will make Colonel Soltykoff hide you in the Embassy, but be true!"

"Jehovah be praised! There I am safe!" Major Denton strode out through the dark streets to the landing! He gazed over the rocky fastness where Attila, Arpad and St. Stephen once ruled! "What a world of shame and brute intrigue! Of crime and cowardly oppression! The Danube's banks reek with unspeakable miseries!" For, Becker's dark design was now plain at last! As he stepped into the boat house the chief handed him an official dispatch. He read by the lantern there: "The 'Sultanieh' passed Semlin an hour ago at full speed, going down the river!" Denton groaned, "Too late!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LEAGUE ON THE BOSPORUS—THE INDO EURO-
PEAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY'S GENERAL
AGENT!—A SLENDER CLUE.

Major Denton's agony of mind touched the official's heart! "Cheer up!" he said, "I will send one of my men with my cipher down to Semlin with you! At Kalocsa, Mohacs, Draneck, Gombos and Neusatz he can call me on the wire! At five in the morning, you will reach Semlin. There you will have my dispatches and you will also have the help of all our frontier officials who will have reports as far as Galatz for you! Let me take you to my house! Your man can stay here at the Polizei station! There is nothing to be done, save for me to solemnly warn you that after you pass our frontier you are not safe until you reach the Russian Legation at Stamboul! Give up all lingering after my man leaves you at Semlin! Watch, spy and study! Keep your own counsel! Remember that the Principalities are the moral charnel house of Europe! But once in Constantinople, our Ambassador can communicate by his Dragoman and there even the Turks fear to offend the Powers! As an individual, you can do simply nothing!" There was no gainsaying the wisdom of the official!

"It is a gloomy outlook!" muttered Denton, as he gave his last directions to Janos! And, heavy-hearted, he slept.

Fraser Denton opened his weary eyes three hours later in the guest chamber of the chief's house! He rubbed his eyes as the chief reluctantly shook him up!

"You have just an hour for coffee, toilet and to reach the boat! My man goes on the boat! He will attend to all! I have made your own man known to him! Go to your cabin at once! He will join you there!

Avoid him on deck! Now here is Moses waiting for a last word! I go to the telegraph office to wait till the last moment! I will come to the boat! I get off at Ofen! So, good-bye till then! I guard you to Orsova! After that! Beware!"

Denton eyed old Farøe Moses keenly as the tall Jew, clad in a frayed gaberdine, approached him! He wore the humble garb of a Galician Hebrew money changer. But, the keen, brilliant eyes shone out with the experience of sixty years in the Levant! The world's college of pastmasters in human duplicity. "What is it?" the soldier cried, proceeding to an unceremonious toilet!

"I came," slowly said Moses, "to put my life in your hands! Colonel Soltykoff has promised me one passport in and out of Russia, as an Armenian, for any agent I may name. It may be worth a million piastres to me, for money can not buy the Czar's seal! I will now trust to him and you!

"When I went to Mohacs, I found all the retinue of the Princess Esmé on the 'Sultanieh.' I know the Aga of the eunuchs well! We have dealt together in the harems! He whispered to me that the Princess Esmé had already secretly left Belgrade for Rustchuk, Shumla and Varna, where a yacht awaits her! The Turkish agent at Belgrade effected this incognito departure under pretense of a summer excursion of his own! He has his own river boat and Imperial Trade of Free Navigation! But the attendants and train of the Princess Esmé are on the 'Sultanieh.' This wild man devil has all the papers and 'laissez passer' of the Princess!

"It would be worth my head if Mustapha should find this out! Beware! He may entrap you, murder you, and escape under the safe conduct of the pretended royal passenger! I could not sleep! I rose and sought out the Rabbi and our chief banker here! I have learned to-night what I knew not before! This scoundrel was once mixed up in revolutions here! His

friends were sold, betrayed, and he may have stolen back to secure some buried treasure, old papers or plunder that he dared not remove in his former flight! For the Magyar avengers drove the traitor from the Danube! So, beware! I have bidden these men communicate in Hebrew with all our friends along the whole river! They will trace him, and I shall know all at Istambol! For the news will follow by mouth to mouth! We, the despised Israelites, dare not write our secrets. The telegraph is denied to us! So tell Soltykoff I have earned my reward! I will earn it again! But, my own life hangs on a thread! Mustapha would see me die by inches if he knew that I had warned you!"

"The name of this wretch! You said that he was a Magyar!" Fraser Denton's heart beat in an agony of suspense. "Janos Kinsky!" whispered the timid old Jew. "An adjutant of Honveds! And seven of his fellow officers were shot, or walled up in Olmutz by his cowardly betrayal! The whole Magyar nobility was endangered by his sale of his only birthright. Magyar loyalty to the foreign Austrian tyrant! There are brighter days; perhaps, as Hungary has now its whole fabric rebuilt, he might placate the avengers of blood! But, even the Aga knew not why he has secretly returned! He went in disguise to Presburg, and ordered the 'Sultanieh' to await him there at Mohacs! Now by the God of my fathers I beg you beware! You now know all! I have heard nothing! I leave to-day and will meet you as you have said! My life is in your hands; yours in mine! I must away! For, if he would know of my visit to you my body would float in the Bosporus, the bloody mark of his rage!"

When Major Denton saw the splendid palaces of Pesth fade away behind him and Buda's hills slowly disappear he then unfolded the papers thrust in his hand by the chief, as he sprang off at Ofen! Two dispatches were there. One from McIvor. The bluff old sea dog's message was a ray of light, "Waiting at Brit-

ish Embassy!" The other said simply, "Following; nothing new yet!" In that, spoke out the tortured heart of Arpad Falka!

The American dared not breathe the hated name of the bloody wretch, the name of Janos Kinsky, as he gazed out of his cabin window at the dreary lower river reaches and its scattered hamlets! But, in his sad heart, he knew that the secret of the dread vengeance rested in the noble mother's untold story of the past! "Will she unveil her heart to her son?" He writhed in bitter agony to know that only, all too late, their eyes were opened! "Ilma, beautiful, stainless one, to be dragged away to untold shame by her father's murderer!" and then, the American wondered if an Austrian political vengeance had not stricken the great noble dome! "Kinsky as a craven Judas might have been far away!" And all these thoughts were bootless!

It was five in the afternoon when the face of his henchman darkened the cabin door. He handed to the Major a folded paper, as the great Danube boat rushed past the old battlefield where Hungary's crown was once lost in the bloody swamps! There was not a gleam of hope left to him, when Denton read the penciled words:

"Orsova—

"The Turkish yacht 'Sultanieh' with the Princess Esmé on board passed the Iron Gates an hour ago!"

"She is now lost to us forever!" groaned Denton. "We have but one forlorn hope! To waylay Mustapha at the Golden Horn and to discover where he has hidden the woman whom he has stolen away! One false step and there would be no evidence left of this beast's foul deed! I see it all! It is disgrace for disgrace; shame for shame! Soltykoff alone can aid us now, for they fear the Russ at the Golden Horn! Mustapha Becker is out of all Austrian jurisdiction now, and he has two hundred miles the lead! We must follow him now, from the other end of the journey! And Moses only can find him!"

Major Denton's eyes had wearied with the monotony of the flat Hungarian plain! He dared not mingle with the passengers and he noted the secret agent of the Budapest chief wandering over the boat with unrelaxing vigilance. Janos, the yager, by order avoided his master! It was already morning when the steamer stopped at Belgrade! A knock aroused Denton, who read the news that Arpad Falka and Paul would leave by rail in the night! "An Israelite came aboard, who told me you would hear from Moses at Rustchuk!"

"When do we reach the Iron Gate?" wearily demanded the soldier. "At eleven to-night!" the secret agent answered. "Remain in your cabin! I will have you passed through the customs all right! But if you have aught to say to my chief have it ready. I take the rail from Orsova back to Buda!"

"My God, there is nothing to say!" groaned Denton, "save that we are too late! Too late!"

Denton gazed gloomily on the rapids of the Danube as the boat in the afternoon shadows swung into the Defile of Kazan! The huge cliffs hung high over the rushing torrent, two hundred feet in depth! The slender road carved by Trajan a hundred years before the Savior's birth, still gashed the mighty rocks!

Every cave and gorge hidden hamlet spoke to the American of the thousand hiding places available to the protean renegade.

"If aught is ever found here it will be but her poor bruised body, dashing around in these black whirlpools! But better even that, than the infamous degradation of the gilded harem hells, guarded by the blubber lipped eunuchs!" He writhed in his helpless rage. It was a fearful fate! Heavy-hearted, the veteran passed the storied cavern of the heroic Veterani, who stopped a Turkish horde, a bloody host, with four hundred heroes, cave-hidden there! And far above him, on the hill of Gradma, the giant inscription of Trajan still told how bold were Roman hearts two thousand years before! They swung along to the Iron Gates!

"There is nothing! Not a word to say! I will telegraph my arrival in Rustchuk through the Austrian consul!" said Denton as the secret agent left him at Orsova! There was not a sign of the pursued vessel, but the agent told him of the strong arm stretched out in vain! "If he had only known," he mourned! "The Ministry had telegraphed to stop and search the 'Sultanieh' for kidnapped Austrian subjects! The boat was a half mile down the river before the lazy Roumanians sent the order down! And now, the black eagle is powerless! Beware of assassination! Go on to Rustchuk, there take the rail to Varna, and an Austrian Lloyds steamer to Stamboul! Do not leave the ship till the dragoman of the Russian Embassy brings his boat alongside. You will be always watched by a dozen hungry eyes! You are now going into the realm where Turkish gold covers every villainy on earth!"

Fraser Denton wearily walked the deck of the steamer as Orsova's lights faded away and eyed the motley horde of deck passengers of every nationality. In the main saloon there was drinking, feasting and a saturnalia of pleasure! "I will play the sick man!" he muttered, "and so, dodge these spies!"

Two weary days brought him to Rustchuk, and followed by his servitor, he eagerly sprang ashore, and hailed a droschky driver to hurry him to the Varna railway station! Fortune favored him, for the train left in an hour! There was a secret friend awaiting him.

"Let me be your guide!" said a smooth-shaven young fellow, who pressed to his side. Though clad in Mussulman garb, he whispered "Faröe Moses sent me! The Austrian consul waits you there in the car! I will lead you to him!" Muffling his face in his Tyrol cape, Denton eyed the domes of the mosques, rising high over the hills of Rustchuk, with their sky-piercing minarets! The laden fruit trees filled the gardens that smiled around, and the mighty Danube,

two miles wide, spread its blue lakelike sheet far over to Giurgovo! Everywhere were scowling faces, loud curses followed the giaour dog, and even the wayfarer and beggar spat in the dust after them! Every second passer-by was a Mohammedan!

"No help here!" growled Denton. "He was on the enemy's picket line!" The young disguised Hebrew pushed through the noisy throng and with a glance of his gleaming, soft Semitic eyes, signaled Denton to a reserved compartment! There was a grave faced official there, who drew the curtains as the two attendants watched the door outside! "I have chartered this compartment, Major!" said the anxious consul. "I shall watch outside and put my dragoman in here with you at the last moment. Your man and this young Israelite will be the only other travelers allowed to enter! You are armed?" Denton smiled as he showed two revolver butts projecting under his cloak. "Then say nothing to any one. The Hebrew and my dragoman understand all the languages. The Jewish boy will go on to Stamboul with you! My man comes back from Varna! The Embassy's launch will take you off the ship!"

"And, the 'Sultanieh?'" hoarsely whispered Denton. "Left here forty hours ago, under full racing speed! The Princess Esmé embarked here in a Pasha's barge and no one was allowed to board the yacht, which only slowed up in the stream! My dragoman will have all the refreshments you need. Do not leave the car or speak to a single stranger till you are at Varna! Once there instantly drive to the Austrian steamer! Do not leave it even for an instant! and beware of treachery! You have nothing in your luggage to betray your identity?"

"Not a single scrap of paper but my passport and letter of credit, and they are here!" Denton tapped his broad breast!

"Then auf Wiedersehen! God guard and guide you!" cried the consul, as he motioned Denton back, while

he glided from the car! "I have provided all your tickets! The Jew will arrange all with the dragoman!"

There was not a word spoken above a whisper until the train rolled into Varna in the gray of the morning! There, on the low sand bank, the dirty town huddled with the shallow Black sea stretching far out to north-east and south! The low red-tiled houses clustered around the dingy mosques and kiosks, and the wild shouts of the Moslem throng woke the drowsy echoes of the dirty streets! Huge clumps of cypresses marked the resting place of the thousands of French and English who died here that the Turkish rule might spread its unspeakable horrors on the hither side of the Bosphorus!

When safely over the side of the stout steamer, "Tegethoff," Denton swept the open sea with his eye! There was the trackless blue waste, over which Ilma Falka, the daughter of a princely line, was to be wafted away to the scene of her hideous death in life!

Denton pressed the hand of the dragoman in adieu, and murmured a blessing on the friend in need who had made the dangerous way smooth! His heart beat in a tumult as the great ship swept on far to the south, where low fog banks veiled the narrow Euxine pass of the Bosphorus! Filthy pilgrims, greasy Jewish beggars, swarthy Armenians and knavish Greeks screamed and jostled on the open deck forward! The cabins were empty and, a half hour after leaving, a ship's steward summoned the American voyager to the captain's cabin. "You are my guest!" said the sturdy sailor. "I have orders from the Embassy. Pray join me here and leave your man on watch in your room! No one must see you!"

Denton bowed, while his grave face lightened, as the veiled friendship touched his heart!

"When do we enter the Bosphorus, Captain?" he asked. "To-morrow at dawn! I'll have you roused up!" the mariner answered. "We reach Stamboul at noon! I have telegraphed your presence already! I

ask but one favor! Do not show yourself on deck at Stamboul till the launch comes for you."

Denton was roused from his uneasy sleep in the captain's cabin long before daylight, as a bellowing gun greeted the steamer's lights with the order of the Turk to heave the steamer to! It was seven o'clock before the fog lifted, and the "Tegethoff" stood into the silver strait, which showed its great walled fortress camp on the low point to the west, and the morning sun streamed through the staring windows of the old dismantled castellated towers to the east! Hidden in the cliffs were huge red batteries and far below at the water line, the grinning Krupps lay, great black war dogs in readiness, and the blood red flag, with its white crescent, waved above the ramparts, whence the wild, barbaric bugles sang the Turkish *réveillé*! At half speed the "Tegethoff" entered the superb strait which for seventeen miles winds through the Thracian mountains. In the varying beauty of its seven bays, no other inlet of the world has the pictured beauty of the one outlet of the Euxine, where Io, as a cow, stemmed the silver tide. Before the great embattled fort on the east side of the sea outlet, the "Tegethoff" halted until a boarding officer gave *pratique*. As a line of foreign vessels slowly followed in their wake, Fraser Denton scanned the hills where once the spears of the Varangians shone. Covered ways, camps, forts and masked batteries dotted the slopes where ruined castle, modern kiosk, fairy chateau and water overhanging gardens filled up a scene of the wildest witchery! Suddenly he turned and grasped the captain's arm!

"What boat is that?" he cried, as a rakish yacht in black and gold sped by, her great full-sized cabin windows all draped in silken curtains! There were but one or two sailors on deck, but the boat passed like a vision, at full speed, the red banner with Mahomet's dread crescent symbol flowing out in a crimson streak!

"That is Princess Esmé's yacht, the 'Sultanieh'! My

God!" cried the hardy sailor, as Denton reeled and then staggered to a seat!

The veteran's eyes were glazed as in a convulsion. His lips moved and yet no sign of speech came forth! Only a hollow groan of baffled rage, the agony of a strong man's heart! The yacht was already out of sight behind the nearest turn of the strait!

"It is nothing! I'm all right now!" gasped Denton. "Can't we overtake that boat?"

The captain mournfully shook his head! "We foreigners are forced by direst penalty to go through at half speed, so the 'Sultanieh' will be well off Seraglio Point before we reach Darius' old boat bridge crossing, half way through! And, that same boat has torpedo boat engines. She can do eighteen to twenty knots and she was doing it to-day! She has come down from the mouth of the Danube!"

Major Denton sought the prow, but his field glasses never showed him the Sultanieh again! His face was as stern as a Pawnee on the war path, and he never smiled, save when the flags on the foreign legation houses at Buyukdéré caught his eye! There was the signal of the forlorn hope! Ilma's last chance! The all powerful Foreign Embassies!

On past beautiful Therapia, Beicos Palace and then Tchéragan, Beylerbey and the great Genoese castle at Roumelie Hissar, where the chain was once swung over the strait, the vessel forged slowly along, Denton noting the American college perched high above, with the star flag floating there! It thrilled the old soldier to the very marrow.

"I will rescue her! So help me God! and the memory of my dead mother!" he swore, as he lifted his hat in adoration of his country's flag of stars!

He shivered as the captain sought him out at last and touched his arm. "There, there is your boat! Fires out now!" and the soldier saw the lean "Sultanieh" lying swinging idly on the glassy waves, before the mile length of palace splendor where Ismail Pasha held

his foul revels, outvying the classic hideousness of Tiberius.

"That is Dolma-Baghtché!" the sailor whispered. "Go into my cabin now! Do not show your face! We will be at anchor in an hour! I will give your men their orders!"

From the windows of the deck cabin, Denton saw the unrivaled panorama of Constantinople gleam out before him in the setting sun! "Thank God, at last!" he cried, as sweeping by the hills of Pera he saw the Russian Embassy, perched high on the hill, under the shadow of the matchless tower of the Genoese! He was dreaming in the glamour spell when the burly captain threw open the door! He cried, "Quick! Quick! The legation launch is here, and a hundred caiques are hovering around! Hold this sun umbrella over your face! Good-bye! No thanks! God bless you!"

Springing down the companionway, Denton entered the cabin of the launch, behind which a great blue and white St. Andrew's cross floated, drooping to the water! It was the Imperial war flag of mighty Russia! In the darkness of the cabin he could not see the man who grasped him in a bear's hug, for all the windows were darkened, but the ringing voice of Soltykoff cried:

"Now for our quest first, then vengeance!" They were at the custom's landing before Denton found voice to learn aught but that Arpad and Paul were in waiting!

"And, Farøe Moses and McIvor Pasha?" he cried. "Both here and we have formed our plan of action!"

"How is Arpad?" faltered Denton.

"On the verge of insanity, but as alert as a panther! God help him! God help Magda!" answered Soltykoff! Seizing Denton by the hand he almost shrieked, "Tell me, Fraser, does she love me?"

Denton gazed in the Russian noble's eyes. "Serge!" he solemnly said, "behind the cloud which has kept you apart, you will find your goddess yet with her open arms stretched toward you and her heart aflame!"

Soltykoff laughed, even in his misery, "I will follow Mustapha to the gates of hell and I will have that girl, stainless and alive! I swear it! By the cross of Christ!"

As the closed carriage picked its way along the thronged alleys of Galata, where a dozen nations mingled, the hoarse cries of the street venders drowned Soltykoff's voice, when he hoarsely muttered, "Have you learned aught?" Denton drew him toward him and whispered, "The 'Sultanieh' anchored an hour ago off Dolma-Baghtché Palace! She passed our steamer at the Pratique station!"

Soltykoff shuddered! "We must never be seen together even for a single moment! There are fifty kiosks and harem haunts spread around the guarded wilderness of the clustered palaces on the European bank here! They are guarded by the fiercest mercenaries and the flinty-hearted eunuchs! We must burrow in the dark! One false step and poor Ilma's headless corpse would be consigned to the gloomy burrows of this vast walled tract! This hell on earth here covers some thousands of acres, and five regiments of brutes guard the wall, besides myriad spies!"

The carriage slowly picked its way along the inclines leading up to Pera, avoiding the clustered brown dogs blinking there in lazy knots. "Have you formed a plan?" whispered the American. "Yes!" quickly answered Soltykoff. "The Russian and Austrian ambassadors, the American missionaries, the Austrian and French banks, the whole corps of diplomatic dragomen, the steamboat officials, and all the chiefs of the Indo-European Telegraph Company, know that an untold reward awaits the daring man who will discover to us poor Ilma's place of hiding!"

"But, none of these can enter the harem walls?" sadly replied Denton! His face was seamed with the lines of despair.

"True!" rejoined Soltykoff. "I have brought Governor Mouravief's word of honor to Farœe Moses, that he

shall have any use of the Russian passport that he ever craves if he will work upon the court barbers, the harem attendants, the Armenian peddlers, the jewel and trinket sellers and bring us news!

"To Moses himself, I have offered half my estates should he be able to penetrate the line of her bloody guardians, and open communication with her! We have but one slight hope of final success! The remarkable beauty of this golden-haired, dark-eyed Hungarian would excite wonder, even among the childish inmates of these gilded cages! We have other possible allies! There are fifty renegade Europeans who hold various stations of rank here! The harems, too, are filled with Austrian, German, French and Italian dancers and singers who have been lured here by men like Mustapha!

"Many of these stay willingly, for their life of license, unfitting them for further artistic careers, is a strange aid to the harem career, these substantial Cleopatras finding strange favor with these Turkish devils! Descending from the Sérail of the Sultan to the great Pashas, these women, loosely guarded, at last find means through attendants, to link their fortunes to the base foreign adventurers who prey upon the Sultan, even under the shadow of the bloody swords of the Nubian guards! Some of these women, mistresses of all the languages, may be safely approached! Last of all, the head eunuchs! They are misers, and all are covetous of gold! Now, Arpad will make a colossal present to the sly Aga, who may listen to Faröe Moses' honeyed tongue!"

"They were already driving into the solid walled enclosure of the Russian Embassy when Denton said, "A demand of the foreign ministers jointly!" "Ah!" sighed Soltykoff, "she would be quietly spirited away at night! There is Smyrna, Salonique, guarded Lesbos and Mitylene, with Trebizonde! There is Damascus, Bagdad, even Teheran! All the harem women travel guarded and isolated! They force the veil and

costume on timid captives and even the willing Mes-salinas! A single sleeping potion, an opiate would baffle the poor child's watchfulness! No! It is our policy to wait with beating hearts in silence and not frighten them into hiding her far beyond any European aid! At our slightest public action, Ilma's life would be forfeited! But, here we are! Arpad waits for you! He says that he must first see you, then to Paul and myself he will give his mother's story in your presence! Poor Arpad! He is but the wreck of himself!"

As the American was ushered up into an apartment on the second floor Soltykoff said, "I will join you with Paul the moment Arpad calls us! Your two men will be taken care of below! This Embassy is at once a fortress, palace, hotel and hiding place! No Moslem ever enters the residence wing! We are sealed up from the world here!"

Denton caught but one glance of the royal panorama of Scutari and the Sea of Marmora, with the far off snow-clad Mount Olympus rising far on the Asian shore, when Arpad Falka sprang into the room! He locked the door and started back, as Denton cried in horror:

"My God! Arpad! You have aged twenty years!" The Magyar soldier's eyes blazed with a wild fire from sunken sockets, and his quivering lips trembled as he said, "Waste no time, Major! Listen to me! Every moment—oh! my God! My sister! My Ilma!" He threw himself in a chair.

"How is your mother?" said Denton, trying to divert the half crazed man. "Barely alive!" groaned Arpad. "It is of her that I would speak! I hold you as of our house, for I have a letter for you from Aida! Bela and her are my mother's children now! Her guardians! We are to be of one family! Hear me first!" The young noble paced the room with tiger-like strides! "All is well at Falkenstein! Paul brought his mother there! Doctor Eschenbach will stay till

the worst is known, or we have found Ilma! Bela is assigned to command the secret guard, a company at the Schloss!

"Now there is Soltykoff, gallant, noble, headlong soul! I know his delicacy, and you can see why my mother has so long held apart from her the love which has been her only hope! Fool! I was so blind! Wrapped up in my water fly pleasures of the moment!" He sighed heavily and resumed, "I tell you the story and we must not wound Soltykoff's pride! You can relate to him what you will, for to-night Faröe Moses will be here with a report! Put me in where there is the most danger! For, remember this renegade has never seen me! He knows all the rest of you! My mother called me to her, on my return and said, 'Arpad! Here is the whole story of my fears, of my past trials! There is but one who must not know it all! That man is Serge Soltykoff! But you and Major Denton must judge me alone! I was a lonely high spirited girl when Gabor Falka brought me to the Schloss! Our perfect happiness endured until this scoundrel was made Adjutant of your noble father's regiment! I knew this masquerading villain only as Count Janos Kinsky! I will not speak of him save to say that he had all the arts and graces! He was, to all appearance, a perfect soldier! So, he soon gained your father's confidence! I put away, as a loving wife, the veiled entreaty of Kinsky's bold glances, and fearful of your father's vengeance, affected not to notice the growing passion of the handsome Adjutant. I wondered at your father's strange intimacy with this would-be traitor, until I learned by many trials, that the assemblies of the nearest nobles at the Schloss had other aims than feudal hospitality, or the chase! For, the ladies of the great families came not with these gatherings, which were held often, at night! There were forest trysts, and in time, strange men of rank from all quarters of Hungary came and went by stealth! Kinsky, enthroned in the Count's private rooms, was busied with

papers and details, and my maids soon informed me of the ingress and egress of friends, strangers, couriers, and even disguised secret agents, all using the secret entrance in the tower! Fear made me silent! I was young and had no one to advise! At first I was madly jealous and then the truth flashed upon me! There was a budding conspiracy! Left with you, a mere prattling boy, as my sole companion, it was Kinsky alone who was always near to brighten the days of gloom! Your father made many secret trips afar, as well as his usual military inspections! It was all in vain that I proudly kept my rooms, and thus avoided Kinsky, while he remained behind at the Count's bidding to guard the secrets of the central conspiracy! He forced himself upon me! It was in the second year of these strange occurrences that, emboldened at last by my fatal silence as to his covert advances, he threw off the mask! I dared not bring your father's head to the block! For even the hangman's halter had been the instrument of Austria's cold vengeance. Kinsky, cold and pitiless, veiling his villainy in warm and romantic pleadings, painted the secret joys of being always near me, of breathing the air of my home! I feared for my husband, I feared for you, my son! For your father's life, for your rank and your birthright! Count Gabor was a reckless political enthusiast, and I saw his brow daily become sterner. We were alienated by his plots, and by my fears! I clad myself in an icy reserve! And so I avoided Kinsky's pursuing wiles! But the day came at last when the crafty scoundrel felt that he held the very lives of the Magyar nobles in his hands! Whether power or a mad passion emboldened him, I know not! But his brutal advances were violent! I screamed in terror! Your father had returned suddenly at a summons of others, for a sudden conference! The retainers had heard my loud alarm! Then the scales fell from my husband's eyes when they showed him the false friend caged in the round tower! You know of your father's headlong vengeance! The

brute was chased away from the lands of his fathers, but after four years the vile assassin glutted his revenge! I had never dared to tell your father of Kinsky's continued insolences! Even in my girlish widowhood I saw that some hostile influence pursued the circle who had held the secret of the tower entrance, the gallant men of the midnight juntas! Some disgraced, some sent to exile, several punished for fancied offenses, a cold remorseless hatred seemed to be hounding them all down! Now, I know that my sad widowhood, your poor sister's coming and the high loyalty of the Stahrembergs may have saved the headless clan of the Falkas! But, though Kinsky never reappeared, his voice alone must have denounced the baffled patriots! I shut myself up! I avoided society, and I longed to see you, my son, a high officer of the reorganized Austro-Hungarian monarchy!" Arpad paused as Denton interrupted, "I see now why your mother has held Soltykoff aloof! She feared some further vengeance! She has lived in terror during all these years! Poor Magda!" The Count bowed gravely, "You are right! The rest is brief! When I was away at the manoeuvres this summer, in my absence this scoundrel Kinsky, in the guise of a Turkish official of rank, has several times shown his murderous face near my mother in Vienna! In several artful letters, he renewed his suit! He ignores my father's tragic fate! But he boasted of wealth and power! It seems that his passion is undying! He craved, begged, even threateningly demanded, an interview! To all this, the reply was silence! My poor mother, fearful for her son, hastened to leave Vienna for our seemingly impregnable home! The brute had his own means of watching her! He reckoned but too well, upon my mother's timid pride, her fear of scandal, and her solicitude for Ilma's marriage and my high place at court! This beast failed not to threaten that having recovered all the original papers of the conspiracy, he would denounce my mother as the accomplice of my

father, and so work Ilma's disgrace and my own downfall! Perhaps even the escheat of our estates and the attainder of our title and blood! Rumor had linked my mother's name with Colonel Soltykoff, as a prospective wife, the situation at the opera party confirmed his fears, and I know not what brutal menace the renegade used, but my poor mother's fortitude gave way! This coward cur vaunted his Turkish immunity! 'You shall never be another's!' he wrote! 'You sacrificed your husband! If you would save your name, fortune, your children's welfare, their rank, then, let me throw myself at your feet! If you do not, beware, for I will strike you to the heart!'"

"Ah!" groaned Denton. "Now I see the fatal mistake! Your poor mother feared to risk your life in a duel, perhaps to endanger your princely house! She read the villain's threat as directed against herself! He planned but too craftily! And so, with a mother's self-sacrifice, she took the risk in silence, kept you in ignorance and has held poor Soltykoff aloof! The riddle is read! Has Farøe Moses told you all?"

"Yes! Soltykoff, Paul and I heard him last night!" answered the haggard noble! "Now, I will send Serge to you! What will you tell him?"

"I will tell him only that you and Ilma were threatened with disgrace and the forfeiture of your birth-right as the result of a father and mother's unpunished political crimes! That Mustapha Becker Kinsky had once gained the ear of the Austrian secret service! Shall I tell him of your mother's feelings? Soltykoff risks his life now for her! He will go on to the end—*quand même!*"

Arpad gave Major Denton a sealed letter! "My mother bade me give you this letter for Colonel Soltykoff, after I had told you all! I think that he will learn his fate therein! Now I go! Do as you would with what you know! We must be at work! For this is my darling's first day on the Golden Horn! Moses has his spies everywhere thrown out over Stamboul!

The whole network of Jews and Armenians are his secret agents!"

Colonel Soltykoff sprang into the room as Arpad's footsteps died away! "A letter for me from Magda?" he gasped! Fraser Denton handed him the note in silence, and then walked away to the window. He turned his head as the Russian sprang toward him with a transfigured face! There were but two aching hearts on God's footstool who knew the purport of the few lines which sealed them forever as brothers to eternity. The woman Soltykoff had made his goddess traced only these words:

"My Serge!

"Find Ilma and I am, while life lasts, yours,
"MAGDA."

The recital of Arpad's story was a brief one, for a new life seemed to be leaping from Soltykoff's bounding heart through his pulsing veins. His eyes told the story which Denton refrained from seeking! There was a reward in store for the loyal Russian! Serge listened in silence and only swore a terrible oath when Denton abruptly finished.

"The coward cur! To trade upon a woman's mother heart! One word to Arpad and the gallant boy and I would have dragged the brute to bay, and left him lifeless at her feet! To sacrifice only herself, she has offered up Ilma unwittingly! Ah! God! We must act now!" A knock at the door interrupted them! Soltykoff sprang to the rencontre, with a warning wave of the hand!

"The Ambassador would see Colonel Soltykoff on the instant!" said a grave-faced secretary!

Fraser Denton's eyes wandered over the matchless panorama below! Seraglio Point, with its silver and azure domes and minarets, its fretted kiosks rising from cypress clump and tender green tracery of the garden bowers, far away Prinkipo, a blue cluster of floating islands on the fair Marmora; stately Scutari, teeming Galata below, and the palace bordered straits

far sweeping to the Euxine, clasped in sculptured hills! He thought of the dear, defenseless head, and then his soldier heart gave way in one great sob, "May God bless and bring her back to us!" In another moment Soltykoff burst into the room. "A clue! A clue!" he excitedly cried. Denton sprang to his side. "The Indo-European Telegraph people have an absolute laissez-passer of all the Orient. Now, only the Austrian and Russian ambassadors will get the secret reports of these men, the Greek and Catholic clergy, and the steamboat men, as well as the foreign bankers! For no man's life would be safe who conferred with us! By a strange accident, the chief of the Indo-European ran up to the mouths of the Danube to see about the Turkish secret cable system to the Euxine end of the Bosphorus, which from St. George's mouth, Kustendji and Varna is joined to the secretly sunken telegraph line from Ismail! At Kustendji, coming back in his launch, he passed on his way to his own steamer a state barge returning to the 'Sultanieh' two days ago! There was some danger of a collision in the gray of the early morning and Grafton called out his orders to his steersman in English! Then a voice rang out from the barge, a woman voice! 'Help! Help! They are carrying me off!' There was a woman's name which Grafton did not distinguish as the boats drifted apart! The sturdy Englishman chased the barge to the steamer which had run in alongside of his telegraph boat, the 'Faraday.' When he neared the new arrival, the gilded cabin windows of the 'Sultanieh' told him it was one of the Sultan's royal yachts! Then, even a bulldog Englishman was forced to halt! For nothing but an English battleship or a Russian royal cruiser would have dared to search that pleasure steamer, bearing Abdul Hamid's own bloody flag! Grafton reported at once to the British Ambassador, who sent his first secretary over here to us, as agreed in our secret plan! Now for our conference! They will serve us our dinner in our own private room! My man and Arpad's yager alone

will enter! We must send for Moses! We must explore the secrets covered by the great palace walls, which shut in the whole enceinte of the Sultan's mimic wilderness here! The poor girl whom we seek is concealed there to-night!"

And, late into the night the group of four men listened to Faröe Moses' frightened whispers! Paul Denton's eyes gleamed in a burning fire of love's agony; gallant Soltykoff eyed the haggard Arpad, while Fraser Denton, stern and soldierly, drank in every word as if taking orders for a forlorn hope!

Not a league from them, her face buried in the cushions of a divan, Ilma Falka's heart sobs mingled with her cries to the God of the fatherless! Crouching at the inner door of a little pavilion, on a jasmine-scented knoll of the Sultan's garden, two hideous Nubians, with drawn scimetars, watched the friendless girl!

CHAPTER V.

THE PAVILION ON THE HILL—A GALLANT FRENCHMAN!—THE RED HANDKERCHIEF!—MUS-TAPHA'S LAST SCORE!

It was long after midnight when Serge Soltykoff forced Paul Denton to conduct the frantic Arpad and Major Denton to their rooms in the great Embassy, at once barrack and palace! "If you cannot sleep we can at least separate, to think!" said the only man who now retained a moiety of self-control! The Russian soldier sought his room, where before his mirror, a portrait of Magda Falka gleamed out of the exquisite tracery of a chiseled Moscow silver frame! The goddess had spoken at last!

"My own darling, mine at last!" he cried, as he pressed the words she had penned, to his burning lips! His heart leaped up in one wild oath, "Foi garde, hon-

neur defend, silence à la mort!" A tap at his door called him! He sprang to the threshold! There Paul Nelidoff, the Czar's courtly Ambassador, stood, with a warning finger raised! The Czar's representative had been suddenly roused from his sleep! "Follow me!" he whispered, and he led the way into his bedroom! There, burly Arthur Grafton, the British telegraph magnate, sat eyeing his old friend, McIvor Pasha! Nelidoff motioned to the wine beaufet and drew up the smoking tray. "I am going to send a courier off to Vienna, Colonel," he said, "and, any documents you or your friends may wish delivered, you may give to me in the morning! My courier is at your orders, for you cannot trust here even the sealed legation bags! The Turks take them to pieces deftly!" There were a hundred fond messages of love which sprang into bloom in Soltykoff's happy heart! For his gracious love had spoken, and though afar, he knew that he was the king of her glowing heart!

"My friend Grafton has promised to leave to aid me here one of his confidential men, who can work the Indo-European Company's secret code, and so reach every key clicking in the orient! The whole two hundred offices have had this secret alarm sent them already, and a full description of the missing lady! The operators have also notified every missionary headquarters to simply report to any European operator any suspicious fact! Grafton kindly connects his own recorder with the instrument here in the Embassy! The banks, steamboat agents, and loyal foreign houses all have the same tip! McIvor Pasha here will move around the capital on the 'Faraday,' and thus watch every sailing of the Imperial yachts! We always know when a harem is transferred, by the steamer companies giving up the whole deck for the tented shelter of the guarded beauties! Now can you suggest anything more? I am of the opinion that the poor child is now hidden somewhere in the vast maze of royal palaces between here and Buyukdéré! The chance of Chris-

tian intrusion is almost nothing within this great walled labyrinth! Since an Italian secretary of legation was butchered for clambering over the wall here, five years ago, no foreign gallant has dared to brave the hidden swordsmen! From this vast garden, palace, seraglio and hunting ground the poor child can be spirited away from a dozen landings, or carried off to Adrianople or the interior! It is a devilish revenge! For you tell me that the little Countess never even saw this brutal enemy whom you now pursue!" Soltykoff bowed assent! "Why not make a public joint demand of the ambassadors?" he queried. "Ah, Colonel, the Turk has fanatically guarded his harem for centuries and has always ignored every such inquiry! They regard women as simply passive instruments of pleasure! No! I am now going to bid your circle to watch the cafés, the clubs and the bazaars! Let Moses work all his concealed wires! The promise of gold will loosen many a tongue! Let him work in secret! He must not follow Mustapha Becker! Only make a search for a gold-haired beauty with black eyes, who is treated like a queen! Do you see now why the renegade Kinsky will not let poor Countess Ilma know her impending fate, nor know who he really is, nor why she is dragged here to this hell on earth, whose lights twinkle here below! Only the foot of the Sultan must break her rest! No one dares to ask whence the victim has been decoyed, or who she may have been in the outer world, from which she has disappeared! So, the Ottoman Government can easily certify that no such person is in their dominion! A lazy reference to the passport lists, then a sealed lie. 'She whom you seek is not here!' But, once in the harem, ignorant of even her captor's name, there is no protection for the innocent lamb but the mercy of God! And, God sleeps sometimes!"

Nelidoff tore away the curtain and showed him the silver Bosphorus far below, with the red masthead lights of the anchored ships! Like golden fireflies, the watch

lamps of the harem shone out below them, there twinkling in the perfumed groves of Beylerbey! "That hell on earth of Turkish beastliness! When will the blue and white cross sweep this scum into the waters, where their helpless victims have floated? When it is death before dishonor, here death is brutal, even if merciful! I saw the gleaming body of a headless woman drawn up from the waters below, by the screw of my own yacht, here, this very year, near Buyukdéré! Oh, for one day of dead Skobelev, and our victorious troops at San Stefano!"

"Now all your friends are to search and let Mustapha Becker alone! I will trace him if I sink my whole allowance of secret service money for a year! Listen! Soltykoff, now! Do you remember Pozziani, the great Viennese dancer, 'the spirit of the air,' so called, who strangely disappeared from Cairo, when Verdi went over and brought out Aida?" The Czar's minister was speaking to the old Admiral! "Yes! Yes!" cried the sailor! "There was a great outcry! We thought that she had 'volunteered!'" "Not so!" answered the Ambassador. "Cherif Pasha stole her away at night bodily for Ismail! The pursuit was hot! There was a clamor in Cairo, and Ismail Pasha, only a Khedive, feared the wrath of the French, and the Suez Canal was his dream then! So as Verdi made a great hue and cry, the Khedive sent the 'Pozziani,' an unwilling victim, over here as a present to Abdul Medjid! She lives still, though neglected, and has never forgotten her wrongs, nor forgiven either Pasha, Khedive or Sultan! Abdul Medjid has passed away, and the poor woman, the witch girl of twenty years ago, has to-day, a pavilion on the hill there, where the road winds out to San Stefano, above Beylerbey! My colleague, the French minister, was a young attaché at Cairo when poor Pozziani was the peerless star of Vienna's dancers! She is mistress of the Turkish and Arabic tongues, and now, at forty-five, she has the freedom of the whole enclosure of Beylerbey! Her

taste and arts, her graces and kindliness endear her to the diamond-eyed younger queens of this hundred Sultana harem! All seem to have forgotten that she is a foreigner! Her French, German and Italian make her useful to the harem women, as an interpreter. She is a favorite with the reigning beauties! Now the gallant Frenchman has for years plotted her escape! He waits only for his own departure that he may take her away disguised as one of his retinue! It is, alas, easy enough! She is a wreck! No one would know the spirit of the air! Every Sunday he rides out to dine with the chief of the Credit Lyonnais, here, at his villa beyond the walls! And there is often a signal floating from the pavilion on the hill! His poor prisoned suppliant knows several angles of the wall, where they can exchange a few words, or her cipher letters, thrown over the enclosure, reach him! He has found one faithful woman slave whom Pozziani befriended, who can bring him messages, but no letters, for they are all searched on going out. Life would be the penalty of discovery, the lives of both the women! Now this brave Frenchman has promised me to have Pozziani visit this week every single kiosk in the whole city of pleasure there! Do not tell your friends this! There must be no recklessness! Even if the French minister only picked up a scarf thrown down from above he would be recalled, and our last chance of communicating with Ilma would be lost forever! For they would ship her to Syria or Anatolia, or hide her in a prison, if they did not kill her, and bury her mangled body!" Soltykoff bowed his head. "I promise! For her poor life depends upon it!" "Yes!" gloomily said the Ambassador. "Even the last Venus and Psyche in the museum here are headless! The Frenchman has already sent for the woman slave. He will work every art and report only to me! He must be left entirely in my hands! And before a week we will know what there is to know! Do you busy yourself with Moses. We will watch all external communications and the

brave Pozziani will risk her life to save her unsoiled sister! For, I have promised my French colleague that if the dancer escapes, she shall return to her friend from an apparent residence in Russia, in comfort, and so be spared the indignity of general compassion! Tell Moses that I will give him any boon he asks, anything that is not treasonable, if he finds a way to reach the helpless girl we seek! Now, remember, not one of your four men must be seen outside of this Embassy with any other of your search party! My dragoman will give to each one of you a different attendant when you sally forth alone, and I will have him provide each day a different coach! Go always well armed, and never venture out at night! But for you to be seen speaking to each other in Stamboul, Pera or Galata is simply to invite a death trap for both! Alone, under conduct of an official cavasse, you are safe enough in the day! One thing is certain! Mustapha will try to avoid the public eye here! If he moves around it will be only by night, or on the Bosphorus! He will, however, watch the Austrian Embassy from afar and that is why you are my guests! We may throw him off the track! Now, good night, or rather, good morning!" Serge Soltykoff seized his superior's hand, "God bless you, General! You are making lion-like efforts!"

"For this poor girl! Heaven help her!" sighed Neli-doff, as he sent his two English guests away in his own carriage! It was not unusual, for night is as day in Constantinople, where from the low revel of the sailors' drinking booths to the dalliance of the crystal lit chambers of the Seraglio, pleasure and sin chase each other in the watches of the night! A dance of death!

The stars were low in the west, when Serge Soltykoff sealed his letter to Countess Magda Falka! His brain was thronged with a hundred visions of hope and fear, but his tender heart was all aflame!

"She will at least know how I love her, that I know of her own awakened love, and that I will serve her to the death!" said the soldier, as he affixed his father's

seal to the message in readiness for Nelidoff's courier! Though no words had been spoken, the Ambassador well knew that love alone led Soltykoff across the dark Euxine to the dangers of this quest perilous! And so he had delicately ordered a trusty courier to be the means of bringing the lovers nearer to each other in this time of agony! The wild bugles were singing from the Caserne du Taxim, on Pera hill, long before Soltykoff awoke! He sprang to his feet as the Ambassador touched his arm!

"All ready, I see, Serge!" the diplomat smiled, as he picked up the envelope. "I have gathered your friends' letters and Sabouroff will wait at Schloss Falkenstein for my cipher orders! Now I am going to send each one of your friends on a round of the city to-day, in different paths! Suppose you run up alone to Buyuk-déré in my launch! They will receive you there at the summer station of the Embassy! From there, my people will send you round the city's walls home in a carriage, and you can thus reconnoitre the city of death in life from all its sides! My own cavasse will show you poor Pozziani's pavilion on the hill! For the sake of her you seek to find, show no apparent interest in anything! The sooner you replace your Wiener vivacity by the dull apathy of the Turk, the better for acting out your assumed character of a dangling attache!" Soltykoff eagerly departed on his first reconnoissance. The day seemed a year long to the ardent Russian, who gazed out into the high walled gardens of the harem enclosure with a soldier's eye, as the little steam launch threaded the swift current, sweeping along the very shore! Beautiful wooded hills, where all the graceful animals of the east wandered at will, dells and groves, flowery closes, palaces of enchantment, great parks, fairy kiosks, pavilions peeping from fragrant bowers, and marble mosques with penciled minarets, made up a fairy land panorama!

Builded down to the very water's edge, fantastic palatial summer abodes gleamed there, side by side

with the dozens of windowless, deserted houses, there where the swift, clear waters hurried away to the sapphire bosom of the Sea of Marmora! Far away Stamboul, with the distant isles of Prinkipo, gleamed like the vision of a summer night, beyond the gleaming waters, crowded with stately steamers, flitting shallops, the bird-like white-sailed yachts and hundreds of swiftly darting caiques! The drowsy calls of the Turkish fisher boys lulled him! It was only in riding back alone around the ruined walls from Roumelie Hissar that Soltykoff's soldier heart leaped up at the sight of the Seven Towers of the old knightly Christian days, and the stately aqueduct of Valens, builded when Byzantine ruled the East, and long before the thunders of the Vatican shook the civilized world! It was while driving down a deep cut road toward the shore, near Beylerbey, that the cavasse pointed to a pavilion perched on a hill a hundred feet above them to the north! The scarped wall was broken down here and there, and now and then, a gleaming veil could be seen for a moment, far above them. The cavasse touched the soldier's arm significantly. "There!" he whispered, To the south, a stream ran in a deep ravine below the road, and in a rolling, broken tangle of little gardens and clearings, could be seen the nests of many of the commercial foreigners of Pera! A Turkish gardener here and there tilled his half acre, and great clumps of cypress, myrtle, maple and yew hung over the winding, shaded road!

The defile was over two miles long, the carriage road, in side cutting, following the irregular enceinte of the harem enclosure! "Bandits and bad men come here!" muttered the cavasse, seated on the box in all the glory of silver staff, scimeter and pistols and his brave Albanian garb! It was a gloomy, lonely road, the way scarce wide enough for a single carriage, and the splendid foliage of the Sultan's gardens swept far down over the walls in graceful masses!

"An active man might easily get in there!" mused

Soltykoff! "Ah! Yes! I can see that a desperate lover might find a way here! But, what dangers lurk over the wall for a hardy *giaour*! The first challenge would betray the bold foreigner, even if he mingled in the throng, well disguised! Ah! The Minister is right! The French diplomat may easily catch a note tied to a pebble and cautiously tossed over! But, there is a dead line drawn, fatal to the mad man who enters! We must trust to Moses' spies and to the Pozziani on the inside! For here, any rash bravery would be only futile madness, and it would seal Ilma's death warrant!"

Tired and weary, Soltykoff regained the Embassy on the hill! A message bidding him to drive alone with the Ambassador gave him a secret hope! But the gloomy faces of Paul Denton, the Major and Arpad told him only of the ravages of their burning anxiety! "Nothing, not a single word, or even a hint from Moses!" was Arpad's barren answer to his query! There was that in Count Falka's eye which caused Soltykoff to bid the American veteran watch over the distracted brother in secret! "He is on the verge of insanity or suicide!" whispered the Russian. "I fear that his secret agony will cause some outbreak liable to ruin us all!" And Paul Denton's face, too, was as the face of the condemned! It was a dreary and bootless day's work! For, the lost Countess was facing her ordeal alone!

The little dinner of his excellency, Paul Nelidoff, was served on this evening in his study, and it was left for Madame la Princesse Nelidoff to matronize the "cercle intime" of the Czar's diplomatic family, in the great dining hall! For, of all the world's great cities Constantinople presents the greatest difficulties to the housekeeper! To live "en prince" is safe and pleasant, but at what expense of wasted gold? To be a houseless beggar is easy and practicable, yet even the myriad brown curs who cover the sidewalks in their lazy Nirvana, live easier than the homeless Turkish poor!

For the average "bourgeois life" of European comfort is there unknown! Even the foreign clerks, who live in clubs, the European agents and merchants have their stately pleasure houses out of the limits of Pera and Galata, and the "hardy, self-denying" missionaries are forced to seclude themselves in the palatial splendor of Robert's College at the beautiful summit of Roumelie Hissar!

It is to the credit of the "Children of Light" that the Sultan, yielding to Admiral Farragut's plea for a gift of land, kept his word when the sly preachers picked out the most splendid coign of vantage on the whole Bosphorus! It will be an active "son of Belial" who ever gains a point on the American missionaries of Turkey, Syria and Egypt!

In the words of the festive cowboy, they "are no slouches!"

Paul Nelidoff passed the Cyprus wine and then lit a huge Cleopatra "papyrus" after the second course! He tried to show a certain confidence. "I now put you on your word of honor, Serge!" he slowly said. "For, a man's life hangs on your prudence now! A distinguished man, a man whose loss would bring the whole allied fleets here. Yet even that would not protect my gallant French colleague! Your comrades are all nerved up to desperation, and they seem half demented! I trust to you alone! Young Falka is capable of any sheer madness now! Paul Denton only sees the situation with a lover's hungry eyes. He and the Major are Americans, cool and brave, but, they are unused to the damned wiles of these beasts of Turks! You and I know that woman is but a passive pack slave here, a bearer of burdens, the degraded instrument of man's lust in the orient!

"By the holy Vladimir Monomach! It makes my blood boil to think of Christian England upholding this blood-stained flag, the badge of lust, murder and nameless shame!

"Wait, wait till we hurl ourselves on these brutes, when the Czar's time has come! Old as I am, I could be the first stormer in the breach! What unutterable human villainy these beauty haunted shores have witnessed!

"Now listen to me! I will back you with the Legation's whole force, money, men and prestige! You alone shall know of the whereabouts of lovely Ilma Falka! You alone shall rescue her, if we decide to try a coup de main! For once alive and stainless back in our hands, her rank and identity would be a protection, even against Abdul Hamid's polluting hand. But one sudden suspicion, one single alarm, and the poor child's tender body would be thrown out in fragments as carrion to their dogs! Else degraded, dishonored, she would be sent off to be the sport of some brutal Pasha, such as the beastly Vali of Erzeroum!

"Trust to me, Nelidoff!" cried Serge, starting up. "My heart beats in the bosom of that girl's mother! My last drop of blood is vowed to this quest!"

"Serge! Serge!" sadly said the princely diplomat, "I call for your brains, your matchless nerve, not your blood now! I call for the thousand arts, the matchless patience, the powers of dissimulation that took you safely over Armenia, Anatolia, Persia and Kurdistan, to far Kashgar and Cashmere, without a single Moslem eye piercing your disguise!"

"What I did for the White Czar I can do for Magda Falka's sorrowing heart! The Czar owns my sword, but the woman I love owns my heart while it beats, my soul's adoration to eternity! Trust me and try me!"

"You will promise to be guided by me in every step?" cautiously said Nelidoff. "I know our Russian hearts of fire under the ice! and yours, is love kindled!"

"I swear obedience to your Excellency!" gravely cried Serge Soltykoff, kissing the little medal he had taken from a dear dead mother's bosom when cold in death!

"Then know that Vicomte de la Tour has at last heard from the tortured Pozziani! Her heart bounds to aid in saving Ilma Falka from the shame which blighted her peerless loveliness, and ground her heart under these dogs' feet! There is to-day a golden-haired girl with flashing black eyes, a carefully guarded stranger in a kiosk, not far from the Pozziani's pavilion!

"The Pearl of a Thousand Purses!" so-called, "and she is guarded by the Aga of Abdul Hamid's own eunuchs! To locate her, to open a safe communication is the Pozziani's task for a whole week! In the meantime, de la Tour will arrange with me for a body of picked men to be concealed near the house on the hill where Pozziani is loosely guarded now. To get Ilma Falka into Pozziani's pavilion and to make a dash for the wall is the best plan! There both women will be met by de la Tour and myself! I will have all my men hidden in the house of the resident of the Credit Lyonnais. In that long cut road, we will secrete some of each party. Once out of that enclosure, the two women will be hurried away in our two carriages, an Ambassador in each, to this Embassy, and when here they will be safe, for the Turkish dogs dare not claim them back for a life of unutterable shame! But, death lurks all along the path! I will trust to you to accompany me! The others can be taken by the route of the wall to the French bankers, and I will give young Falka and the Dentons a chance to fight for Christian womanhood, as I know they will! But they must be kept in ignorance to the very last moment! I will provide all! Arms, vehicles, and all requisites, even disguise for the two women, now clad in this detested harem livery of hell! Not even when they go to the rendezvous must they know! I will be there to bid them come on!"

Serge Soltykoff trembled with helpless rage! "My God! So near and, we are so helpless!" "It is the only plan!" replied his friend. "You see I will not per-

mit even you to leave me until a night has calmed you! Then you can carry deep in your heart your secret, and later do your duty to God, your fellowmen and your own true heart!"

"How can Pozziani work her schemes?" murmured Serge. "With gold, with the arts of twenty years of harem prison life, and her own long assumed apathy! For, de la Tour has always prevailed on her to hide her own dreams of escape under a mask of easy contentment! If any woman who ever entered that enclosure can reach Ilma Falka it is the ex-dancer!"

"She, a Viennese, has the Magyar tongue to aid her, she has graduated downward in splendor from every degree of state in that maze of palaces! She knows them all, their every turn, and as to the use of gold, well, human nature is human nature, even in a harem! Two things only are universal, the lust of gold, the love of pleasure!

"As for the power of gold, age can not wither it, nor custom state its infinite variety! Avarice rules a willing world! Gold is your modern cure-all! Old Lycurgus was right when he banished gold from Sparta! 'Tis gold that makes the modern world but a mart, a cheapened mart, for man's honor and alas, for woman's chastity!

"Remember!" said Nelidoff at parting. "Not a soul but you and I, must know of de la Tour's visits! He will prudently reach the Pozziani by the means of letters thrown over the friendly wall, and the slave girl's messages!"

"How about Mustapha?" feverishly cried Serge. "Ah! 'The captor of the Pearl of a Thousand Purses' lurks somewhere within this human Golgotha. For Becker has two infamous royal bidders for this peerless treasure. Abdul Hamid, the Sultan, might yield to the English gold hoarded by Ismail Pasha! And Mustapha, renegade, pander and spy, lurks hidden in Dolma-Baghtché, or wanders around Hamid's mazes there till his infamous best bargain is secure! My se-

cret agents tell me that he has a sort of floating influence, stretching from Morocco to Cairo, from Smyrna to Trebizond, and even to Ispahan. He is known from Salonique to the Golden Horn and Vienna! No! He will hide! He is a star of the political and military renegades, spies, panders and villains who swarm in the orient! There's not a plan of defense, an arms contract, a loan, a naval construction or a monopoly scheme that is not bled by these allied human vampires, who are an infamous table round on the Golden Horn.

"The rejected scum of the continental nations turn their glib tongues and quick wits to profit here! Behind them the Moslem voluptuary hides, bloody, brutal, pitiless and linked to a thousand nameless crimes! Now, Soltykoff, absolutely insist that no mention be made of this sly scoundrel! Not even a careless inquiry in gambling haunt, pleasure club, café or music garden! He has his busy network of spies! He must not know of the presence of Arpad Falka here! Above all, Falka must only go out disguised at night till we need him! And only under my special permission!"

Soltykoff's iron nerve stood him in good stead when he rejoined the Dentons and Arpad Falka! The young Count was as fretful as a chained tiger, for with them the brown-faced Faröe Moses was already secreted in a grave conference!

"Have you news—news of her?" hungrily demanded Falka. "I have here telegrams, secret ciphers, a full report from the Austrian ministry! They can tell me nothing—nothing! My God! to be helpless here!" The friendly circle sought in vain to soothe the half-crazed brother's fury! "What have you to tell?" "I have nothing!" gravely answered Serge, "but the Ambassador has now a thousand avenues opened to our secret friends!" Major Denton's grave voice answered, "Moses has discovered Mustapha Pasha lurking in his usual dalliance, around Ismail Pasha, the broken-down Khedive, at his royal prison palace! But, the spies say

that the disguised Kinsky has never come to Pera, Galata or Stamboul since the arrival of the 'Sultanieh!'

"The Jews report that Mustapha was seen at Tchernavoda and Kustendjeh! The scoundrel then came down along Trajan's old wall, and so avoided risking his captive in the long voyage around by Galatz and the mouths of the Danube! This confirms Grafton's report of the strange happening up there! We are all of the opinion that our missing sister has been or is here, but she is clearly in other hands now than his!" As the mournful accents died away Falka sprang to his feet. "Ah! My God! Spare me!" he cried. "Those other hands! Would that I could die to free her! Ilma! My Ilma! My own darling!"

"Patience! Patience! I have Mustapha under watch! I have many friends at work, all the jewel merchants in the palaces! They will track him soon! And then we can act!" Mindful of the young Count's growing desperation, Serge Soltykoff had effected the transfer of Arpad and Paul Denton to a double chamber! "If no one will aid me I will break away and go on my search alone!" cried the brother, as at last they broke off a thousand useless queries and gropings after the truth. "You would be but a useless sacrifice, Arpad! We must trust to the whole circle now working through Nelidoff!" said the Russian Colonel with a stern decision. And even gray old Moses nodded, "That is wisdom!" as they separated.

While the restless rescuers vainly sought sleep, a man muffled up, darted out of a carriage which had sought the most infamous of the midnight dance halls of Galata! A private door admitted the burly incognito, who threw off his robes as he reached a private room! He was followed by an armed cavasse! "Go out and fetch me the head steward!" was the order. And Janos Kinsky, in the plain, dark dress and fez of a Turk of rank, rolled a cigarette, while his brutal eyes gleamed in a cruel pleasure. "To catch Mr. Sly Boots! Ah! What a score! The last score! No! The mother

waits! She shall be struck later! Or, would it not be well to let her linger? The white-faced prude! Damn her! I would drag her at my horse's tail if I had her in Anatolia!" He laughed mockingly! "Will she come down to find Mademoiselle Ilma? By heaven! I would like to see the meeting after Ilma has passed a week in the Red Pavilion! There's no baby nonsense there! What is good for the master is good for the man! Yes! It would be a merry meeting!

"Ah! Hochholzer!" sharply said Mustapha, as a pudgy maître de ceremonie came in, bowing and scraping.

"Send me in some wine, quick, Tokayer! and Champagne! Your best! And that Capell meisterrin of yours! The lily faced devil with the blue eyes! Quick! By the way, bring her yourself! My man Hassan is on guard at the door, and he is apt to make awkward mistakes with his weapons!" Mustapha chuckled, "If I trap this young fool, will my luck hold with the mother? She might travel! By God! If I could get her in the Tyrol or down on the Adriatic there is Bosnia and Herzegovina! I might use this devil girl Marie! An imagined escape from a harem! With a likely story! Wait! Wait!"

He sprang up and welcomed a slim, graceful girl who came bounding in! "Well! Bel Demonio! Order what you wish!" he said, carelessly, as the girl's lithe arms twined around him! She was clad in faultless vestal robes of white, her burning red lips and cool malignant blue eyes shining out under a brow of seeming girlish innocence!

Her ophidian countenance of lurking devilry was wreathed in glowing smiles! "Bon soir! auf Wiedersehen! Monsieur, the Devil's Brother!" she carolled! In five minutes, the feast was spread!

"A nous deux!" toasted the declassée Viennese beauty! They were alone! "Tell me what you wish!" "Come here!" gurgled Mustapha, as he held up a flash-

ing diamond. "Tell me the truth, and earn this, with a hundred guineas more as pin money!"

The wanton was sitting on his knee, as he imperatively said, "How did you meet this young fool, Arpad Falka?" The music girl had the diamond in her slender hand when she said, "He came in here the other evening with an agent of the Russian Embassy! One of my lovers, one of my slaves!" she pouted! "Go on! No nonsense!" shouted the brute renegade! "No foolery now!" She answered, "They lingered a half hour! I knew Count Falka! I had played for his regiment at a supper fête in Vienna, long before our orchestra came down here! I made the mouchard fellow tell me all! Count Arpad is here on some secret business, and he is in hiding at the Russian Embassy! That's all! He did not recognize me! I was afraid that he would, but I set all the girls at him! He flung them some guineas, and then, the two men went away!"

"Will this Russian fool, who is your dupe, do your bidding?" "He would swim the Bosphorus at my nod!" the vicious woman proudly boasted!

"Hark then! Miss Marie, the Devil! Get one of your own trusty scoundrels here to call that companion of Falka's to you to-morrow early! Send him to Falka, with the packet I will give you! Then do you come at once to me at the gateway of Dolma-Baghtché! Get yourself up like a Turkish lady!" he grinned. "I will give you a jolly afternoon! Bring Falka's answer to me just as you get it! There is another diamond and two hundred guineas if you succeed! You can bid your Russian adorer come back here to supper with you after the concert! In this room I want to see who he is! And so, neither you nor he will play me false!" The renegade's face was livid with satisfied passion. "It is the stroke of a lifetime! The last score! For the proud mother shall live to be mine! This she wolf here can play the ingénue! She is the one in a million for me!" He muttered his joy and carelessly kissed

the woman's curving lips. "I will be your purse bearer if you serve me well!" The siren murmured, "Only tell me what to do!" There were empty flagons and scattered roses on the table when Mustapha left her! The oblique serpent eyes of the girl quivered a moment as the renegade said, "If you bungle this, by God, I'll throw you to the fishes! Make yourself sure of your lumbering Russian dupe!" "He shall be crazed with his own blind nonsense! I can twist him around my finger like a hair!" The reckless girl's eyes gleamed with the fires of hell!

"Here now! Mark me! This handkerchief! Just as it is! This letter you will write! Seal it up, and then bring me his response!"

The girl trembled as she read:

"She whom you seek sends you this! I am a woman friend who dare not leave the harem garden! But you were seen in Galata and followed to your home with the Russians! I can bring her to the wall of the cut road in the valley south of Beylerbey! *Come alone!* You will not be signaled if any one else is in sight! Come to-morrow, when the shadows are on the cut road! Ride up alone! If you wear a red handkerchief around your neck, an old Turkish farmer will hand you a paper! You will know the name! Ilma Falka! But no one else must know! Then I can watch for you as you ride up the road! You shall speak to her, and she will tell you how to conceal your friends when you can carry her off! There are two or three hidden places where one can safely speak over the wall! Remember, come alone, or you will never see the farmer, nor the one you seek. The place is abreast of the Red Pavilion! Alone! Only alone!

"A Christian Captive and Your Friend."

The dissolute girl threw the diamond on the table! "You would butcher him! That beautiful young man! Never! I will not!" Her breast was heaving, her eyes flashed defiance. "Anything, anything, but that!"

"Fool!" howled the renegade, as his hand closed on

her throat, and he bore her backward upon a divan! A gleaming knife pricked her swelling bosom! "I'll drive this into your heart if you dare to murmur! I will have my fellow Hassan here wait and watch you! Old Hochholzer will bring you, bound hand and foot, to me at my villa at Prinkipo! Do you remember Lena Hartman? She, too, made a mistake! I'll send you to ask her if she regrets it! There's no baby play at Prinkipo!"

"Mercy! Mercy! I'll do anything!" the struggling girl pleaded. "Anything you bid me!" "There!" grunted Mustapha, casting her away! "Now you have had your lesson! Pour out some wine! Don't be a fool! What's this junker to you? Play your arts on your Russian! I'll shower gold on you! I have a year's luxury waiting you! Ah! I see that I can trust you!" The girl was cowed and her eyes told of her self-surrender! "It's a pretty trifle!" she said, as she gazed curiously at the handkerchief. It was marked with a coronet and a monogram. "Whose?"

"He will know; that's enough!" growled Mustapha! He rose and quickly called the minister of pleasures. The low-browed wretch came back with a double roll of gold! "Pin money!" said Mustapha. "Earn it and more!" "I will!" cried the wanton. "I swear!" "Yes! I will watch you, too!" growled the renegade. "Now! Marie the Devil! You know your whole part! Send Hassan to me the moment that your Russian fool promises! Come to me in the afternoon when he reports that he has given the Count his cue! You shall have a day as Sultana, and also, see the harem world!"

In another moment, the burly scoundrel was closely muffled and left the room, his warning finger held up! The girl with the serpent eyes picked up the diamond.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured, and then, draining the champagne bottle, followed Hochholzer out to the hurly-burly of the dance hall! She shuddered as she noted Hassan's ferocious eyes following her in the dance!

"I must not fail him! Some other would do his bidding, and I——" she thought of missing Lena Hartman! Her fate was no secret! The girl knew Mustapha's deadly work too well!

"I have done a good stroke of business!" growled Mustapha, as his steam launch sped along the glassy Bosphorus! The girl is well frightened! I will ply her with wine and gold! Women's cure-alls! But, the little joke of the red handkerchief!" He laughed, as he lay back on the cushions, a devilish ringing laugh, for the striped scars on his back, made by Gabor Falka's brawny huntsmen, were now burning in a dull fire!

"By God! I'll train this white-faced devil up to steal the mother! This is the last score, but then, then only the score will be wiped out!"

Two days later, the Russian embassy was filled with eagerly excited men, running to and fro, as with a sinking heart Serge Soltykoff vainly demanded Arpad Falka. The Ambassador was absent at the ministry of foreign affairs, and Farøe Moses had led both the Dentons away to question some of his spies hidden in his own great commercial bazaar, when the grave intendant answered: "I can not find the Herr Graf Falka! He is not in the Legation!" Serge's heart sank within him! He bounded to the Austrian's room. It was empty! "Has he killed himself!" was the first fearful thought! "Alas! He has broken away!" For cloak, pistols, Alpine hat,—all were gone!

"My God!" groaned Serge! "He has taken some demented notion of a lonely quest into his head!" Then Serge gnashed his teeth in rage. "I dare not leave till Nelidoff, till the others, come! And, if I went out where would I seek for him?" It was dark when the Ambassador drove into his high walled courtyard! His face paled as Soltykoff hurried him into the nearest waiting room! "This is ruin to our last hopes! Falka may have tried some desperate scheme! He paced the room alone last night, Denton told me, after sheer

exhaustion had closed his own eyes! Perhaps he is with the others, and—Moses! We must wait till then!” Something chilled Soltykoff’s heart! “Has there been foul play?” He smothered his fears and waited in gloomy misgivings! No one had seen the young Magyar noble leave the Embassy enclosure! He had been moody and restless all the morning, shut in his room, and busied in writing a letter to his mother, which still lay sealed upon the center table! It seemed ominous of farewell!

“Can he have killed himself?” was Serge’s self-torturing fear! “Great God! It would fill Magda’s cup of bitterness to overflowing! My own bright, brave darling!” And yet, he waited with a timid hope for the return of the others!

They came, but with them no Arpad Falka! “There has something happened of the gravest character! I fear the worst, gentlemen!” said the Ambassador, as he hurried his secret agents out in every direction!

“You can do nothing but wait! I only hope this brave youth has not madly sacrificed his sister’s life—and—his own!”

The gloomy cypress clumps of Beylerbey were throwing long black shadows to the east, under the last glimmer of a setting sun, as an athletic young rider spurred his horse along the harem wall bordering the cut road in the gulley! “Don’t you want a runner? That’s a lonely place up there,” said the valet de place who pocketed Arpad Falka’s gold at the steamer landing. The runner who had ridden the horse up along the shore from Galata, lazily eyed the young giaour! “Let him wait here! I may need your horse again! I will go back on the boat to the customs landing! I will be back in an hour! Here are your two guineas!” The interpreter slowly walked away as he watched the young noble disappear. “Rides like a soldier! What the devil is he up to? There is no fooling with the Moslem girls here! Perhaps he has friends on the hill among the trade millionaires!” The stable attend-

ant squatted down at the corner of a wall, and lazily produced his tobacco box! His watch was the number of burned cigarette ends! And,—he had a good backsheesh promised. When Arpad Falka had left the shore a few hundred yards, he loosely knotted a red silk handkerchief around his neck! Slowly skirting the wall, winding along the picturesque ravine, the red scarf flamed out like blood in the glancing rays of the setting sun where the last beams slanted over the western hill! The brother's heart was bounding in his breast, and his eye noted every turn of the road, every winding of the wall, where a reëntrant angle, or a drooping tree gave cover for a brief parley! There were shattered rifts where a faint glimpse could be had of the graceful wealth of trees within. The faint note of the nightingale was heard, and the breeze wafted a thousand odors! Never lover kept tryst, with a heart beating as high in a strained expectancy of ecstasy. Once or twice, the spirited horse swerved at a shadow and then, Falka's hand sought his revolver butt! And the grim Fates were spinning! But all was silent as the grave, there was no one in sight! He eyed the wall, from beyond which the distant strain of a band floated to his listening ear! The tinkle of bells borne by gazelle or the pet sheep of the wealthy Moslems sounded drowsily! The Bosphorus shimmered far below in the dying sun, like a lake of fire! "My God! Is it a mocking failure?" he whispered, with burning lips! "And yet her name, the crest and broidered name!" That handkerchief was on his heart now! The last mute appeal of a sister for aid! The mystic token of womanhood's presence! Ilma's handkerchief! Her dear lips had pressed it! Her tears had bedewed it! And the brother rode on into the gathering shadows! He raised his head as an old man extended his arms, appearing suddenly from a clump of trees by the northern side of the road! The hillock rose up a score of feet, and the wall on its sloping line was but ten feet high above! There were

tangled vines and brambles falling over the wall, and a growth of stunted trees, where wind blown seeds had been swept over the barrier from the witching gardens beyond! Falka's cry of joy was muffled as the steed leaped forward. The old Turk stood there, his hand touched forehead and breast in salute, and then he gravely extended a little folded paper!

Pointing to the deeper angle of the bend, Arpad saw at a glance, that it was cut off from any view down the glen!

His eyes were flashing in joy as they followed the mute old Turk's pointing finger, for a rounded arm was thrust through a cranny in the wall! A woman's hand, holding a letter, appeared for a single moment! To spring from his horse, as the old Turk seized the bridle was the work of one last moment of suspense!

Arpad Falka sprang up the bank to where a veiled head appeared, for one instant, at the lowest point of the crumbling barrier! He pushed aside the tangled vines to reach a pyramid of stones fallen from the coping!

One more step and the letter was within reach! "Ilma! Ilma! Ah, God! Darling sister!" There was a smothered groan as the scimitar flashed in the dying day behind him! The proud noble's body then rolled headlong to the road below! There was no old Moslem farmer there, but a riderless horse clattered wildly down the glen! "Finish! Finish!" yelled a bearded man who had sprung on the wall! Two swarthy brutes leaped out of the shrubbery, and leaned over the senseless body! With one wave of the arms they disappeared in the glen below! There was silence, save for a mocking laugh, for a man was now hastily riding around the turn below! The Count de la Tour reined up, by the body of Arpad Falka lying there, with a Kurdish dagger through his heart!

BOOK II.—The Pearl of a Thousand Purses.

CHAPTER VI.

A FORLORN HOPE!—ILMA'S DREAM—THE TRANSFORMATION.

The two Dentons were closeted with Soltykoff at dinner, when His Excellency Paul Nelidoff entered hastily! Soltykoff sprang up as he saw the ashen pallor of his superior's face! The two Americans, with sinking hearts, listened to Nelidoff's stern voice pouring out a few Russian sentences! Then, Serge Soltykoff turned to Major Denton. "I am asked by His Excellency to beg your word of honor that neither of you will leave the Embassy till he permits! The last glimmer of hope for Ilma hangs now on your heroic self control, for——"

"Arpad!" cried the two Americans. "Will never return!" said Soltykoff as he buckled on his revolver belt and slipped a Circassian dagger in its sheath! "His mangled body lies even now at the French Embassy! He was found dead in the road, near Beylerbey Palace! He must have tried some mad scheme! We go to the Embassy! Your word?"

"We swear!" said the Americans. Paul Nelidoff laid his hand on Major Denton's arm! "The steamer leaves at daybreak for Trieste! Be ready!"

"Ready for what?" faltered the veteran! "For the hardest task of your life, Denton! I know your record! General Berdan told me of Denton's battery at Gettysburg! But, while Paul and Soltykoff follow

this quest, you must go back and watch over Countess Magda Falka! For, Bela Batthyani will be the Count of Falkenstein and your own daughter will reign in the Schloss! If Ilma Falka be ever rescued—there is a double relationship uniting you in the days to come! Can you be brave and go? You must!" It was a shock to the brave old soldier. Major Fraser Denton gazed from one face to the other. "To quit a forlorn hope!" "Ah! Go! my friend! You have the hardest battle! Now, only Russian craft ever matched Turkish slyness! Soltykoff will lead the chase! You see what Arpad's rashness has cost us all! Serge will follow Mustapha now!"

"Yes! to the death," cried Serge! "Denton! Tell Magda she will never see me again, if I do not find that girl! and Paul will go with me!" "Into hell itself, with you—for Ilma's sake! For poor Arpad!" almost shrieked the young athlete! Nelidoff bade them listen. "Now!" said the Ambassador, "we will learn the facts of the murder and return at once! I have called the French Minister up to the English Legation to meet us! And we go disguised! I fear some sad story! Even now, Ilma Falka may be dead, or has been already spirited away! It is a forlorn hope all round! Treachery, madness, imprudence, or bandits,—some fatal curse follows the House of Falka!"

The two Russians left the Embassy by a secret entrance, and in a street carriage gained the English Legation in Moslem garb, with muffled faces. There were armed servants riding at their side.

As the droschky rolled along, Nelidoff said sadly: "Serge! But one thing will now save this girl! Her life hangs on a single hair!" Serge turned his flashing eyes upon him in a dumb agony. "It is her extraordinary beauty, and the time, the display, the 'setting off,' needed to market the Pearl of a Thousand Purses! If Mustapha acts from pure revenge, then—the daughter of a hundred Counts is even now dead—or worse than dead to-night! This mystery of Arpad's deser-

tion? What is it? Was he crazed?" "De la Tour alone can fathom it," groaned Soltykoff as they reached the Legation. Nelidoff and his friend were quickly shown into a private room on the second floor of the English Legation. The window was open, and far below the ships' lights twinkled, the thousand lamps of the street gleamed like braided fireflies, and the music of a dozen Tzigane bands floated up on the autumn air! "Hell's own whirlpool!" cried Nelidoff! There was a sound of shuffling feet and a man's quick tread!

When the door opened Armand, Vicomte de la Tour, looked as one who had seen the return of the dead! He led by the hand a timid black Nubian woman slave, her face slashed with the three diagonal cuts of her Moslem captors! The poor wretch trembled like a leaf in the storm. "What is this, Armand? You are ill?" cried the Russian diplomat, grasping the Frenchman's ice cold hands! La Tour sank into a seat! The woman seated herself on the floor, and her salt tears fell through her black fingers!

"It is a night of horror!" began the Frenchman! His hollow voice startled them! "You know I was to have ridden out to meet Pozziani! My heart beat high in hope, for this woman, Ayesha, came down to the strand, where I had a spy in a fisher boat, to tell me that Pozziani, poor, brave devoted one, had found out Ilma Falka's gilded prison nest, and soon would have communication with her, through one old aga of the eunuchs, who strangely had conceived a violent penchant for my poor prisoner, who had cured him when ill nigh unto death! The simple old brute had no fear of letting a woman approach 'The Pearl of a Thousand Purses'! Alas! It was my mail day! I was late. I sent my horse up to the landing below Beylerbey, and rode smartly across some vacant gardens to the cut road! I was over half an hour late at my tryst, but I feared nothing, for Pozziani was always allowed to roam at will in the limits of that great Seraglio Park!

Poor and middle aged, her ornaments and jewels taken away for younger favorites, she had neither gold to buy friends, nor beauty to allure lovers now! So, I watched the road to see her signal momentarily floating at the Red Pavilion—a white scarf from her upper window, indicating that she was walking near the wall! Suddenly I saw a man, in European garb, ride slowly along the winding cut road, only a few turns above me! As he passed a point, I saw he wore a red neck handkerchief floating out in the breeze behind him! Red is the Moslem signal for death! Fearing that it was only some blundering tourist, I spurred my horse up! I had two reasons, as I galloped along pistol in hand! I wished to warn the stranger and also, to turn him back so that I could meet Pozziani! I wished to warn him of the dangers of the sinister emblem he wore! I feared some bandit lure! Some trollop siren's snare! But, while I lost him from sight, as I gained the cut road in pursuit, I suddenly saw a man on a knoll across the ravine, wildly waving a red handkerchief! He was either signaling to some one on the road, or else over the wall. Before I could ponder as to retracing my steps, a riderless horse came madly galloping down past me! And I had lost the stranger from sight! Desperate now, I spurred on, and in the road, at a clump of trees under the wall, I saw poor young Falka lying dead in the road! His neck was nearly severed by a scimitar cut from behind, and a dagger was thrust in his heart! There was no one in sight, but thanks to God, the rattle of wheels announced a coming carriage. It was a jolly party of French clerks who were riding into town for the cafe concerts, their nightly haunt!

"We quickly lifted poor Falka, and one of the young fellows rode my horse! We drove like the wind down to the second landing, where my own Legation launch waits for me every evening! A dozen stout arms soon lifted him in, and the young fellows, by my order, rode away, without a single word to the Turkish

police! Now, I reverently searched young Falka's body! To my horror, I found these!"

Nelidoff and Serge shuddered as the pale Frenchman laid before them the handkerchief of Ilma Falka, with its dainty crest and the word "Ilma." It was blood stained, and a brother's heart's blood dyed it! "Here is the cursed red handkerchief, the signal of death! Here is the lying letter, a woman's letter, that lured him to it!" The gallant Frenchman sobbed. "And, clutched in his dead hand was this little paper with the name 'Ilma Falka!' Some devil lured him to his death. But, who?" Soltykoff read the blood dabbled letter and then handed it back to Nelidoff in silence. The Ambassador gazed at Serge! Then their voices broke out in a hollow groan: "Mustapha's deviltry! He trapped him to his death!" But, a woman! How could Falka yield to a woman's arts—a low intrigue, at such a time!" The Frenchman was incredulous! "Impossible!"

"You do not know Becker Bey's arts!" said Soltykoff! He must have discovered Arpad Falka's hiding place and he divined our pursuit! But how in God's name could he reach Falka, with such a clumsy snare! He must have tracked him here from Vienna, through spies, and then used some Seraglio girl or some hell-damned woman renegade, to pretend to lead Falka to his sister! Where is the body?"

"At the Legation, in my chapel, with our priest in charge!" bitterly said la Tour. "Stop! You have not heard all! Falka was armed. He must have been lured up to the wall, and then struck from behind, while parleying. The woman who wrote the letter did that, and then, gave the signal to the swordsmen hidden in that clump of bushes!"

"Now, I was busy with disposing of the Count's remains, and with planning this meeting when this poor, shapeless thing, poor Ayesha, Pozziani's humblest truest friend in adversity, tottered into the Legation by the servants' door! My maitre d'hotel always had his

secret orders. He admitted her at once. When brought to me she fell in a faint of fear and broke out afterwards a burst of hopeless grief! For she sought her mistress when the darkness came, and at last found her, where she, poor victim, had waited in vain for me! Pozziani was lying by the wall, stone dead, a heavy red silk handkerchief knotted around her throat! A knife stab told of the sudden onslaught. It was a desperate blow between the shoulders!" La Tour stopped abruptly, and then buried his face in his hands! "I had sworn that she should end her days in freedom! She died vainly for Ilma Falka, and now, we are baffled! It is a blind trail now! What a death trap, this hole!"

Serge Soltykoff had gravely listened as if each word was his own death sentence. "I have this fellow's deadly scheme worked out backward! It was Becker Bey himself, this Kinsky brute, who was the man answering the signal of the waving red handkerchief! He had posted that outlying spy on the watch across the ravine! The road can not be seen from the wall! But, he allowed the false friend to call or signal poor Falka, who dismounted, and was then struck from behind, while parleying! May God eternally damn the wretch in lakes of fire!" And the Russian groaned "Magda! My Magda!"

"But, Pozziani! Poor, friendless waif of fortune," mourned la Tour! "Ah!" said Soltykoff, "from his place of concealment this arch fiend, Mustapha, must have seen her stealing down to the wall! He then hid himself, and, your riding up the road explained the fact of her lurking there! Or else the poor woman may have witnessed Falka's murder! To steal upon her, to stab her, and then to still her cries with the signal kerchief he held, was the work of the wild rage of that discovery!"

"Yes! It is all clear! Too clear! Too plainly written!" The two other men bowed their heads in assent! "I must now hide this poor slave and smuggle her away from Constantinople!" said la Tour!

"And, Ilma Falka?" solemnly said Nelidoff. "Is lost forever, but for the grace of Almighty God," was Serge Soltykoff's low reply! "My God! It is too horrible! Arpad! Arpad! Your self-sacrifice has slain your sister! For, she is lost to us now! Becker will either strangle her to-night, and hide her forever, or she will be spirited away to Asia! But Arpad Falka's death must not go unavenged! The Seraglio here will not be Ilma's prison. For she must live, for their vile uses, and her place of suffering will be far from here!"

While they spoke in whispers of the dead, far below them in the private cabinet of the Hochholzer café chantant, Mustapha was pledging the white robed music girl with the serpent eyes in the sparkling wine! There was a chain of diamonds shining now on her neck! The renegade whispered: "You shall only sing and play for me, for me alone, now! To-morrow you go with me to Dolma-Baghtché! You shall have a year of roses and rosy wine! Of every pleasure! I go to Bagdad, to Damascus, but I will come back to you, and you shall earn your weight in yellow gold!"

The girl's arms were twined around his neck, as she whispered, "You have found then, that Marie the Devil could be true to you! Tell me, only tell me, your wishes! For I will go with you, and be your capell meisterrin!" And they reveled in their hidden haunt, laughing over the sparkling wine!

There was a lonely pavilion in the guarded shades of Beylerbey where a sobbing girl started in her uneasy sleep as the long night wore away! A poor white-faced watcher of the night, who eyed the two hideous Nubian eunuchs lying on a Persian carpet at her door! Their belts bore pistol, Kurdish dagger and the crooked sabre! While one slept the other eyed her with the brutal indifference of his sexless condition! At the slightest sound, the maiden started from her couch with the instinctive protest of womanhood, fearing the delayed horrors to come! For, though she well knew the brutal face of the red bearded captor,

he had only roughly controlled her by the interposition of two Moorish afrites, old women, mere gibbering brutes, and instruments of his will! And the long night wore on, her chamber dimly lit by a swinging silver lamp. Ilma Falka, under God's mercy, dreamed not of the ultimate crown of her sorrows. Her thoughts were far away, by the beautiful blue Danube, and once more her mother's golden smile beamed upon her! Once more Arpad's brotherly arms were clasped around her! Once again Paul Denton, in the lilac walks of "My Lady's garden," spoke, with burning eyes of love, to eyes that spoke again! And her gallant brother had died for her, not a rifle shot from her hiding place.

In the Russian Embassy, there was a saddened group of men gathered around the table in Fraser Denton's rooms as the huge hall clock below struck two with its silver chimes! The Dentons had listened in horror to Soltykoff's sad relation, and were bowed down as if under the stroke of the assassin's sabres! In a corner Faröe Moses, his silvered head bent, fearfully whispered his sage advice to Paul Nelidoff! "What are your plans?" slowly said Major Denton to Soltykoff! The Russian soldier gazed sadly at the American veteran! "I will be frank with you, Major! We have all learned the fearful penalty of imprudence! You must know only this, that Arpad Falka's body will be secretly embalmed and sent on to Trieste by the Austrian Ambassador, who will take charge of all the secret reports to his government! We knew that the Austrian Legation would be watched. Prince Nelidoff and Count la Tour can confer at the English Embassy with the Austrian! I shall leave it to my superior here to instruct you as to what you must communicate to Countess Magda Falka! It is only a pious mercy to lead her later to believe that her gallant son has fallen a victim to the treacherous climate of the orient! It is vital to us now to conceal this murder! Justice is a mere mockery, a vain fantasy, here. The dogged

Porte would, of course, institute the usual investigation! Arpad's death would be officially laid at the door of the convenient 'robbers'! No man rides here beyond the limits of the Pera plateau without one or two armed guards and a Moslem interpreter! We have had to officially ignore Ilma's kidnapping, and so we are powerless to intervene in this officially. No! You must go back to Vienna!

"Prince Nelidoff will give you his written instructions, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Vienna will later have our cipher reports to give to you! The one task before you is to remain at the Schloss, to aid Bela and your daughter in buoying up the mother for the coming sorrow!

"You will be placed on the Austrian Lloyd's boat secretly! Silence, self-devotion and passive watchfulness are your duties! Paul and I——"

"Will hunt this wolf to the death!" cried the young American. "Ah! Arpad! Arpad!" he groaned. "It was a fatal desertion, even though led by love, and it has ruined our one chance to save Ilma here! Poor Pozziani! Her blood also was shed because of his fatal gallantry! To go out alone! Into the very jaws of death! What mad folly!"

The Ambassador approached the table! "Gentlemen!" he said, "Moses agrees with me, that the captive will be at once hurried away to Asia Minor or even beyond! Our one faithful friend in the harem, upon whom we could have counted, is cold in death! A child might know that the hidden guards of the grand Seraglio enclosure will now be doubled! We must show no public sign of our sorrow, no coterie of watchers must linger here under the eyes of the wily Turks! They are now fully on the alert! Farœ Moses has pledged me to notify every Jew of note from Java to Bagdad, from Beyrout and Aleppo to Smyrna, Trebizond, Erzeroum and Teheran!

"I alone must be the medium of the secret orders, for, we have found that we can not trust, even a

brother's love, in this dangerous quest! The head must be cool indeed to follow these vile dogs! The way of this innocent victim has been trodden before by many poor, helpless ones! I can trust Colonel Soltykoff to lend his coolness to you, Paul, and now I pledge the whole force of the Russian secret service in Asia Minor, on the Caspian, in the Black Sea and here, to aid our two champions! Major Denton! Come with me! I will have both your friends roused to say good bye!"

"Will you write?" said the veteran to the two men he was leaving.

"Better let Countess Magda Falka think that we were all away together on the quest, and that you were recalled on some fancied clue found at Vienna! The Ambassador will have my letters to forward to the Countess by our own secret courier at the right time?" Paul Denton bowed in assent to Soltykoff's self-denying precaution!

When the two elders had departed for a last conference, Farøe Moses hobbled to the table! "I swear by the God of Jacob that I will go myself to Dolma-Baghtché, and I will have to-morrow night traced this Mustapha! If aught of note has occurred in that great wilderness of palaces I can reach it! They know me, of old! And the Christian maiden shall live! I swear it, even if I offer up my own life!" The proud Russian grasped the trembling hands of the aged Hebrew jewel vender! "We need your wisdom now, Moses! You shall have what no other man of your race has now, the right of ingress and egress all over Russia! Be wise as the serpent!"

"Ah! We of Israel know these bloodthirsty dogs but too well!" sighed Moses. "From Arabia Petrea to Basra, from Ararat to Rhodes, we glide through their meshes! Trust to me! For my friends in Asia Minor are wise! They see all, and guard their silent watch!"

The great Russian Embassy was soon darkened,

save where Paul Nelidoff sat late in vigil with Major Fraser Denton! "I see your wisdom, Your Excellency!" said the American, as he departed for a two hours' rest before the summons to board the steamer. "I will guard Magda Falka with my life, and sustain her till the coming storm is past! As you say, Paul's face is unknown in the orient, and my visage is too familiar to this renegade's friends from my later occupations!"

There was a four oared caique darting along over the still waters of the Bosphorus as the two men separated! A woman lay on the silken cushions at the stern, idly trailing her jeweled hand in the cool waves! She laughed as she scattered the falling drops which flashed in the starlight like a glittering shower!

"Diamonds!" she laughed! "A diamond rain!" "Yes! and you go to a bower of roses!" laughed Mustapha, as he blew away the fragrant smoke of his peerless Smyrna cigarette! The renegade, Janos Kinsky, was lolling at ease, and secretly rejoicing at the midnight escapade of the white robed bacchante! Wine-crazed and folly-led, Marie the Devil nodded gaily when Mustapha had proposed the voyage in the caique!

"You are mine now!" he craftily said! "Your place in the orchestra will soon be filled by another of our Vienna graduates in deviltry! I will send my own men down for all your belongings. As for Hochholzer, one word from him and I would chase him from the Golden Horn! Your lovers? Well," he laughed. "They can wait. I will see you yet with Pashas at your feet, a queen of Terpsichore, the Devil queen of the Night."

The renegade had simply thrown a boat cloak around her! The music hall costumes furnished forth scarf and Turkish veil! Black silk hood and filmy yashmak completed a disguise, needless now on these lonely star lit waters! Kinsky smiled a cruel smile, as he eyed the girl's lissom form lying there, her eyes

flashing with the fiery wine's borrowed light! "It was a master stroke," he mused. "She might change her mind! All women change their minds! A word to that Russian lover and I might be traced! They will never know now how that fool was trapped! And this wild night-hawk is safely caged forever! For when she goes behind the gilded gate of Dolma-Baghtché, she is mine to do with as I please! If I finish with the Pearl of a Thousand Purses, then I may lure the mother into my hands! Gods! I have it! I will play off Marie the Devil as a beauty kidnapped to the labyrinth of love here on the strait! She shall have the run of the harems! I can train her like a mocking bird! I will let her see this ring dove, when I have her all ready for the journey! She shall have every evidence to prove her story! Her rings, her description, her garb, the very book she had in her hand when she was strolling by the Danube! And, if I can trap the woman who once braved me, then, by heaven, scar for scar, I will scourge her myself! And after, after I have done with her, the slave markets at Aleppo! I have paid my score! Son and daughter! There waits but the last score. And then I am revenged! If this girl only plays her part, the Lady of Falkenstein shall serve her as a menial, on her knees!"

In a transport of frenzied gloating over the future, the renegade drew the girl to his side, in a passionate embrace. When the gilded caique glided up to the marble steps of Dolma-Baghtché, Kinsky grasped the laughing wanton in his strong arms and bore her across the driveway, to where the myrtles leaned over the iron gate of the secret Seraglio entrance. The gate clashed behind them! Marie the Devil shuddered as the forms of two burly swordsmen towered over her, when the arms of Mustapha Pasha released her.

At a signal, one of the guards flitted away in the darkness! The laugh died on the bacchante's lips as Mustapha hurried her through a fretted Moorish door

carved in the marble walls! "You are mine now! Remember!" he sternly said. "Mine alone, mine to do with as I will! Never forget that my will now is your only title to life!"

And the nightingales were singing around them, there, while the shadows hid the fairy beauties of the splendid gardens! It was not a rifle shot to the Pavilion on the hill where the hapless Ilma Falka lay dreaming! "Get your sleep now, Marie!" said Mustapha, as he clapped his hands, and an aga of the eunuchs appeared. "I need you to-morrow early, for we will transform that dead fool's sister into a houri of Moslem fashion, a morsel fit for a sultan! None but you shall touch her! She is the Pearl of a Thousand Purses."

"What would you do with her?" ventured the music girl!

"She is going on a long journey—a long, long journey!" was the reply. "And you shall decorate her for a royal espousal! A beauty show to come!" Kin-sky laughed, and then, kissed the woman's burning lips! "They will bring you all you wish! See! Clap your hands! So! And—all the head attendants speak *lingua Franca*! Now, good-night! Remember but one thing! There is one remedy for babblers here, for the unwilling—and, that is"—he drew his hand across his throat! Marie the Devil, standing on tip toe, blew him a kiss from her dainty fingers! "Thank you, Pasha! I'm not curious, and—I prefer to keep my head on my shoulders!" He smiled, and pointed to the curtained door!

The sunlight sparkled on the blue Sea of Marmora merrily as Fraser Denton, standing at the stern of the swift mail packet "Franz Joseph," gazed moodily at the Austrian flag above him!

In vain did the enchanting panorama of the *Pointe du Séraï* hover on the western shore, he marked not Prinkipo's fairy castled retreats bowered in the lovely gardens of the opulent East! He cast one look back

at the far shining line of palaces on the European shore, and then groaned,—

“One dead, the other worse than dead, and I, an enforced runaway. Truly a forlorn hope,—the bitterness of death, the shadow of shame, the gloom of defeat! And, my tidings! What a burden!” He walked the deck, as restless as the sea birds hovering in the foam churned wake!

“Are there two more victims marked out for betrayal?” He dared not read the future! Fraser Denton had only consented to go away upon Paul Nelidoff’s word of honor that Bela Batthyani and himself would be the last reserve.

“It may be that money would have bought a way to her! The golden key!” sighed Nelidoff! “But, poor Arpad has paid the price! Blood pays all debts! There is no critic who can carp at his self devotion! But, the mystery! How was he trapped?”

In the dark hour before daylight, Serge Soltykoff and Paul Denton had said good-bye! “Do not fear for us, Major,” said the Russian. “I am hardened to oriental intrigue, and Paul here is as silent as a Sioux brave on the warpath. We shall either succeed or die! I have the handkerchief, the last token filched from the woman I seek! Tell Magda Falka that my blood will dye it before I turn back from the chase! Denton!” said the gallant Russian, as their hands met in the last clasp. “Tell her that I love her more than life! She will understand—at the last.”

The veteran turned away to hide his feeling, but not till he had whispered, “I see her—in the future—waiting to welcome you! Go and may God protect you!”

There was no movement in the Russian Embassy in the long morning of Fraser Denton’s secret departure! For, Paul Nelidoff was shaken with a secret alarm! Just how Arpad Falka had been toled out of the safe haven he knew not, but, evidently the horseback jaunt must have been arranged with the aid of others! The letter, the handkerchief of his sister, all these must

have secretly been brought into the Embassy! It was at a fearful risk for the traitor! Ah! the Czar's representative knew not of the guilty tryst of one who only waited the morn now to seek the white armed Briseis who had served the renegade's revenge! A day of forced inaction had been reluctantly deemed vital to the saving of Ilma Falka's life! "At the slightest sign of any official foreign clamor, that gentle girl would be slain, and her body destroyed!" said la Tour. "No! I will go my ways with a smiling face! There must be absolute secrecy in the final transshipment of poor Count Falka's remains to Trieste! I will have the Foreign Hospital here get up a set of false death papers which the German Minister can certify! No! We must dine, drive, walk the Pera Park, and so hide our griefs!

"By this joint prudence, we may yet hear of the girl alive, in Asia Minor! You have spread all your nets! We will never trace her here! And, Moses and his crafty brethren are your only hope in the Bosphorus! Our last star of hope flickered and went out forever when the Pozziani died!" It was sadly true!

In the marble splendor of Dolma-Baghtché, the music girl sprang to her feet, at morn, when the burly Mustapha grasped her gleaming ivory shoulder! "Here are Turkish dresses!" he said! "You have masqueraded often! Robe quickly! Never mind vain adornment. I will come to you in an hour! Remember, then, my words! Obedience, silence! Your Galata life has taught you discretion, I fancy! They will bring you food!"

"Count on me! Not a word will escape me!" said the beautiful harpy! She saw her master's gloomy brow, and wisely essayed no wanton arts! "Good! I will return! Wait for me here!" The serpent eyed Marie saw his tall form disappear in the shaded alleys, as he dashed away with nervous stride! A glimpse from her window showed her a wilderness of beauty, and she laughed shrilly for joy!

‘This is Paradise in Hell!’ the bacchante murmured. “But, *va banc!* I leave nothing behind! Here is luxury, pleasure, all that is left to me, now!”

There was a woman waiting on watch at the door of the pavilion where Ilma Falka was guarded! An old, wrinkled beldame who smiled most significantly as Mustapha entered the outer chamber and then drawing the curtain satisfied himself that the prisoner was still in his power! One brawny slave lay athwart the threshold and the other guard nodded significantly as he sat there, with a drawn scimeter lying across his clumsy knees! Mustapha then kicked the sleeper with his heavy foot, and giving to each a gold piece, motioned abruptly to them to withdraw! At his side, the old beldame pointed in triumph, to the lovely Magyar, lying there, with one moulded arm uncovered, and her beautiful golden hair veiling her snowy breast! The eyes were half opened, but no sound of alarm issued from her lips, as the scoundrel lifted the lovely arm and let it fall! Ilma Falka lay there, in a dreamy death in life! “Good!” cried the burly brute, watching to see if his voice aroused the dazed beauty! “When did you give her the potion?” he said, in the Turkish jargon of his last adopted country! “Last night, in the drink, before she slept!” grinned the old crone.” “And the visions—the dreams—how long will they last?” He eyed the hag keenly. “Four days. Four days of blessed joy, of half life! She will remember nothing! Almost nothing! I could have given her more *hasheesh*, for she is young and strong! But, you would not harm her! I can bring her out in a few hours, but, she must not be left to herself! She would die without care!” “What would happen?” demanded Mustapha. “She might live, but, she would be a fool, a wandering one!” The old crone then merrily jingled the golden coins he gave! “I am going to take her away! In the evening! Be you ready to go with me! I will send you back from Sinopé, and not empty-handed! Watch over her well!” Mustapha turned at

the door. "Why do I not?" His brutal passions were stirred. "No! She must live to suffer, to die by inches! She must be herself to feel the dreaded shame crawling nearer day by day! Live to have her pride humbled into the last descent of menial thralldom! To be the sport of servants, the slave of slaves, and to wither in poverty under the blows of the eunuchs! But, the exquisite torture of her rose in bloom days! I shall witness that! And so I will not spoil her price! After, after she has suffered, I will set my heel upon her bruised breast! I swear it! I can not afford the luxury of the Pearl of a Thousand Purses! Now, to have Marie make her hideously beautiful, 'en Turque!" He motioned to the guards, who took up their lazy watch again there, when the old hag felt the deadened pulse of the drugged and helpless beauty!

In an hour a dozen women attendants, escorted by Mustapha, entered the pavilion. They bore bundles of robes and all the implements of a sultana's toilet! At his side, now, the Viennese music girl awaited his orders! "Come with me!" he said, speaking in German, and with one hand on the curtain. "Remember! Obedience on your very life!" A smothered cry escaped the woman as Mustapha, led her to the couch where the poor snared dove lay helpless! None but the old crone had lingered! "Ah! God! She is so beautiful. Her mother is not half——" "Have done your foolery," cried Mustapha, as the lovely Magyar stirred like a child in her half sleep! "To your work! Remember! You are to pack up and take to your own room every single vestige of her belongings—every trifle, however small! The women here will show you how to robe her! The articles that you take from her will all be sealed up in a chest! We shall want them in our little masquerade with the mother, later! Now, I go to arrange my steamer for departure! Have this all over by noon! For you and I, will then have our breakfast together! I will leave every order for your pleasuring here, till I return! There is a friend of

mine in the Palace! He will be your squire while I am away!" Mustapha's leer brought the crimson to the hardened woman's cheek! "Now, hearken!" He whispered some orders, and then calling in the chief tire woman, said aloud, "This is your mistress!" The women crouched one by one and kissed the music woman's hand! Mustapha turned, "There is but one thing you must not forget! At this door—the only one—of this Bower of Virtue, these two swordsmen wait! If you even crossed the threshold an inch, they would forget your beauty, Marie, and cut you down!"

"I will be ready for the breakfast! Have some good wine there!" pertly cried the lissom witch of sin. Marie, the outcast well knew that every eye bent on her was a spy's distrustful organ! With an easy air of stern command, she dismissed all save the old crone, when the renegade left after a last glance at the helpless Magyar maid! "It's something of a shame to spoil her looks!" he grumbled. "But, she will be a pearl, in Moslem eyes, when you have painted her eyebrows, daubed her nails and fingers with henna, and stained brown that golden hair! No one must know her to be a European when her gear is all on! Fit her slippers pretty snug so she must shuffle along. The Austrian outcast sprang to her work, aided by the crone, who worked for another harvest of Mustapha's golden guineas! The cymar of milk white silk was soon drawn over the form of the helpless prisoner, who had been quickly deprived of her own raiment! But a single moment did the music girl hesitate as she saw the golden cross hanging around the neck of the devoted victim! "It is my life to falter!" she muttered as she tore away the slender chain! "Quick! To note every bodily mark! Now! The rings!" and the excited woman wondered as she drew off the three rings on the slender fingers of the captive! "They have drugged her, to stupefaction! And, against her will!" A sudden fear possessed the reckless woman! "He could do the same now at will, with me! Oh! God! I must

not let him ever be angered!" So, in a frenzy of haste she laid aside, even the veriest trifle of the prisoner's belongings! Then, with a last look, she clapped her hands thrice! The tire women then entered! Mutely, and with deft fingers they sprang to their task! Two of their number supported the helpless girl, with cushions piled up around her, while a busy circle plied every art of the Moslem toilet! The old crone brought in two slaves bearing a Turkish coffer! And, then, Marie, the outcast, laid away every bit of the European belongings of the stolen beauty! "That is all!" she murmured. "I will give him the cross and the chain and the three rings, myself!" She bade them then bear away the coffer! With a curious fascination, the music girl saw the transformation of the woman doomed to a gilded slavery! Long before Mustapha returned to pass the "dead line" at the pavilion door, there was nothing left in the superbly adorned Turkish figure there to tell of poor vanished Ilma Falka! For, even her chiselled features had changed under the disguise of powder and paint, darkened eyelids, blackened eyebrows, and the walnut stained locks, hidden under a flat green velvet cap, gold embroidered, with heavy bullion tassel! The black silken hose set off the green velvet slippers, with curling, pointed toes, richly embroidered in gold and seed pearl! A magnificent gray brocaded silken tunic fell to the knees, below which the wide, graceful Turkish trousers were gathered at the shapely ankles.

The tunic, fitting close at the neck, was richly brodered with pearl and gold on the bosom and its flowing sleeves open to the elbow disclosed an under-vest of superb Cashmere "dew of the morning" muslin. There was a dainty jacket, a marvel of massive Ottoman needle-work in bullion and pearl, glowing upon the green velvet, whose heavy border was of hand made gold bullion lace! Four strands of superb pearls rivalled the ivory neck in whiteness, and the taper fingers clasped a magnificent round fan with

jewelled handle! The oriflamme of peacocks' feathers was edged with egret plumes!

"What is all this masquerade for?" demanded the saucy Marie, as Mustapha's eye met hers approvingly!

"Silence! Pile these cushions up behind her!" said the renegade, as he saw the girl's form relax under the potent influence of the drug! The eyes slowly closed as if in a coquettish affectation of slumber! "Could she walk?" roughly demanded Mustapha. "We had to support her!" humbly said Marie, in a wholesome fear! "She seems to be bewitched and lies, nervelessly, just as we place her!"

"Good! That will do! Now, keep her that way!" said Mustapha! He turned and led in a turbaned Moslem, adorned with snowy beard and long, sweeping mustache. The stranger's great gown fell over his shrunken arms, he was old and feeble, but a superb aigrette of diamonds gleamed in the muslin folds over his wrinkled brow! His wrinkled hands flashed with superb gems and his sabre girdle was jewelled in lavish richness.

Mustapha led the gloating stranger up to the unre-sisting girl! With a tremulous hand, the stranger tore away the filmy muslin shrouding the victim's bosom! He passed his skinny fingers around the beautiful, slender neck, and then bared one taper ankle.

His eyes shown in a cruel appreciation, as he nodded to Mustapha and then hobbled gravely from the room! A court carriage with a magnificent escort dashed up to the door, and, with abundant salaams, Mustapha saw the stately visitor disappear! He then sprang back into the room, and gave some hurried orders to the old crone, and dismissed all the tire women save one fierce eyed woman of middle age! Then, turning to the wondering music girl, he laughed and opened his arms to her!

"Come now! You have done well! Let us test the Dolma-Baghtché cuisine! The wines are waiting! I am pleased with you! She looked a queen of queens!

I am yours till sundown, then I must go and deliver this Pearl, for the thousand purses await me! Her loveliness is marketed!"

"She would have looked a dozen times better without all that fard and henna, and those trappings! She is a Venus of rarest mould! I never saw a woman her equal!" said Marie, twining herself around Mustapha! "There will be none of her charms veiled, when she reaches her royal purchaser," laughed Mustapha, "and the garb will not matter soon! Like the sun, she will shine for all, in the land that she goes to! Come on! I have good news for you! The Persian Ambassador deigns to take supper with you! You will find him a diamond mine!" and Mustapha led the happy music girl away!

CHAPTER VII.

THE AMERICAN MISSIONARY DOCTOR AT TREBIZOND!—IN THE STORM ON THE BLACK SEA!—THE SIGNAL.

The stars were glimmering over the Bosphorus before the renegade left the table where the reckless music girl laughed over the wine, for a sudden messenger from the palace had held Mustapha in grave converse an hour. He had returned at last, and his apartment was now thronged with slaves bearing off all the luxurious belongings of Moslem travel! Shawls, cushions, rolls of rugs, silken quiltings, jars of wine, sweetmeats and preserves, the gaudy trappings of rank and all the adjuncts of a Pasha of stately wealth!

Marie was light of heart, for Mustapha had given her a purse of two hundred Turkish guineas! "The aga of my household will admit all the Jewish peddlers to you, and you shall lack nothing in my absence! Only, you can not be alone with them. All your own

belongings are now here in your rooms! I leave you with the Persian Ambassador! His friends are my friends! I leave it to your own devil wit to amuse him! He is old, vain, and rich! Flatter him, for man is a dozen times as vain as your own sex. Teach him to believe that you love him!" laughed the renegade! "You can then dupe him to your heart's content! It will amuse you while I am away!"

The wine flushed girl had sung to him the olden songs of the Danube, which charmed him still! She had danced as only a Tzigane can, and now, lay on the divan trifling with the dainty conserves in which the Turk is unequalled. Marie's cup was running over!

"Will you be absent long?" she said, with her flashing eyes gleaming in a devilish longing! It flattered even the hardened scoundrel! "There is a devil of a hubbub about that fool who tried to scale the harem wall! Bah! He brought his death on himself! But I must spirit this highbred trash away! She is simply so much money to me—nothing more! Tell me, you have seen her! Would anyone know her now?"

The serpent-eyed girl mused a moment! "How long will the dark dye color her hair?" she queried. "Oh! The tire woman can fix that! It will stay for a month! It can be renewed, or the gold can shine out in a few days! These Turkish attendants are matchless in the toilet arts!"

The music girl slowly said: "In her absurd guise—her hands decorated en Turquie—with the shuffling gait of those flat, heelless slippers, no one would know her, unless some one of her blood, or else some one who loved her! If they would follow her——" "They would feel the edge of my scimeter!" growled Mustapha! Besides, this dead fool was the last of his race. It is only in travel that I would have no one recognize her as an European!" Mustapha looked anxious! He was evidently disturbed!

"You are all right!" laughed Marie! "The pigeon

toed shuffle, and your veils and yashmak will class her as a stiff-kneed Moslem! Besides, the girl's like an idiot! She can't talk, and has those staring eyes!"

Kinsky, the renegade, laughed! "Talk! You can jabber, but in the few days passed since I netted her, her tongue was clattering away all the while! I would have silenced it forever but for those rounded curves, that baby face and those untouched charms of hers! It was all the same to me! She had never seen me before. So, I let her scream away like a young falcon! I was sorely tempted once or twice to wring her neck, after teaching her a rude lesson! But I have squared an old score, and the thousand purses will pay me well for foregoing Alexander's boasted privilege over the conquered! I am not an idealist about women! You will suit me, for I like your wit, and I can confide in you! I will never lose you now, you devil's chicken! You will be here when I come back!"

The girl's face paled to an ashen color.

"You will not wall me up for life here?" Her hard heart was fluttering in fear! The renegade laughed heartily.

"Oh! nonsense," roughly said Kinsky. "I will treat you better than you deserve! We Turks have the right system! Our women are forced to be agreeable, but, even here, in harem walls, you reign, at last, by your clever duplicity! What matters it? You can not go out! You have no home to go to! You are an outcast! What bourgeois life would give you the splendors you shall taste here? You can sport with pashas, generals and great nobles as you will! Your fresh charms bring you royal empire for a time! And, mark you, you have no care, no labor, no brutality! Jealousy disappears, for treason is impossible! We do not ask feminine fidelity! *We insure it!* And if not worshipped all your life, you have at least kindness, ease and comfort! All the harem women are warm-hearted! They even love each other's children! They aid each other, for no pretty fool pretends to the

ownership, the monopoly of the master's heart here! In the old world that I left, women sport with men! Here, we sport with the women, but they are not cast off as houseless wrecks, to starve and rot, as in your Christian lands! You are all women together, bear the same burden, and gravitate into peace and due submission! You will see that there is more love and a more equal justice in the Moslem harem than the Christian family!

"But you shall have all your old time books, toys, music and comforts! I like to keep up my Magyar! Now, you will be repaid for your efforts just in proportion as you are agreeable, and always be treated better than you deserve!"

"Can I never leave here?" said the weeping girl, for the excitement of the wine was fast leaving her now.

"What would you go back to? A music girl's life! A tawdry show existence, an old age of starvation, unless a stab from a jealous lover some day mercifully came to set you free? I'll be kind to you, if you serve my purpose, and you shall be rich and sport with your fat-witted victims here! I have already a future use for your splendid abilities as an actress!"

Janos Kinsky spoke not unkindly. "This girl, her fate?" she faltered. Marie was, at least, the shadow of a woman.

"Ah! By God!" he hissed. "She was born to feed my vengeance! To wipe off the score of a life! But that I wish her to know every step of the road of ruin, to feel every pang of womanhood till she sinks to be the common sport of peasant soldiers. I would have first had my will of her, and then toss her in yonder stream!"

"She will not know! She is silly, a mere soulless body!" said the music girl.

Kinsky laughed. "I would have saved myself all the trouble on the Danube if I had known of the hasheesh solution! I only wish to blur her mind till she wakes before her royal purchaser! I have bought

her cheaply with her brother's blood, and sold her well for a thousand purses! She is a pearl now; you may live to see the wasted shell! No! When her royal adorer receives her, she will gleam out before him, golden-haired and without a blemish, 'en grande dame! Her mind will be cleared of all these dreamy visions, and she will only know that I have brought her peerless, perfect, to where her coy reluctance will be my life's one triumph! She has been systematically drugged!"

The loud cry of the muezzin was suddenly heard from the slender minaret hard by! Kinsky clapped his hands thrice. The gray aga of his own eunuchs appeared, bowing low in silence! Speaking in *lingua Franca*, the renegade said, as the music girl watched them, her bosom panting in fear: "Hassan, this lady is your mistress! Your head shall answer for hers! She is to see any one she wishes! She is to have every desire fulfilled! She is to have all that can be dreamed of in pleasure, and be her own mistress! Only, not to cross that gate! Do you hear me?" The slave stepped forward, and, kneeling, kissed the music girl's robe! For she had attired herself in stately dress to please the renegade, who yearned at heart for the lissom witches of Vienna!

"Are you not better off here," laughed Kinsky, "free in slavery, than to be a slave, in freedom, like your class on the Danube? You have to sell your beauty there in any mart, here, your market comes to you!"

It was ten o'clock, and a messenger thrice summoned the noble Mustapha Pasha before he left the woman at his side, now a witch of the Wine Demon! The music girl had drank deeply of the silver-necked flagons, and her serpent eyes gleamed with a devilish joy!

"Make all your pleasures real! Wrinkles come soon enough!" said Kinsky, when she had finished a wild Tzigane love song. He then grasped his jeweled sabre, and turned to her in good-bye! "The girl, her

attendants!" she cried! "All embarked, they wait!" said the alert Pasha! "Remember! Your life, your future, is in your own hands!" "Stay!" the wild-eyed girl faltered. "This golden chain, these three rings! That is all she wore on her body! Take them!"

The renegade's face was livid! "I will make her wear these when—— Never mind! Auf wiedersehen! You will be true, for I trust to Hassan! Beyond your wandering afar, you are your own mistress! Remember! The Persian comes to supper! Hassan will report to me, and—send me any letter you care to write!" The curtain fell and Marie the Devil felt her heart chill as his heavy tread was heard on the marble stair! Her lonely room was haunted by Arpad's ghost, and the girl shuddered.

"He, at least, was a human being! And now I am alone in his gilded den!" The transition from the teeming life of Galata's thousand pleasure haunts to these silent garden shades seemed to her to be only a vision of the night. And yet she robed herself in mocking state to sup with the Persian!

She cried: "He may be right! I can reign here by my wits!"

It was near midnight when a few lights twinkled on the decks of the graceful "Sultanieh" as she lay moored in front of the Beylerbey palace! There were first several heavy barges warped out slowly to her shore side, and then a few caiques began to ply around her, graceful as flitting, stormy petrels! A burly man with a night glass stood on the decks of the "Faraday" lying a half mile away! When dense smoke began to pour out the two rakish funnels of the "Sultanieh" the captain of the Telegraph steamer ran quickly into his own cabin! Shaking a sleeper who was alike oblivious of the distant howls of the Constantinople dogs, and the strange wailing cries of the Moslem night, the sailor cried: "Rouse up, Admiral! Show a leg! The yacht is swinging round. We will have all we can do to keep her in sight!"

"Where does she head?" sleepily called McIvor Pasha, as he threw on a robe and sprang out on the deck!

"Off for the Dardanelles! By Jove!" huskily cried the captain, as the "Sultanieh" pointed her graceful swinging prow below Leander's Tower and slowly gathered headway, going down at quarter speed, with the six mile current aiding her!

"By God! They're off for Smyrna!" growled the old Anglo-Egyptian. "Unbank your fires, and then make for the Asian side! Take a long sweep in! They will think that you are one of the Italian fruit traders! But, when they are well around the first bend of Marmora, take their trail and then, Captain, work your engines for all they are worth!" The "Sultanieh" was not masked by Seraglio Point more than five minutes when the "Faraday's" shackle was slipped on the buoy!

"Farøe Moses was right!" growled old McIvor, as he lit a cheroot and watched the "Faraday" gather her headway. The canny Scotch engineers were already plying every trick of the trade! "The big harem goes to Smyrna! They could hide this poor girl at Afium or Angora, till all had blown over! Of course, they would closely guard her and dress her like a Turkish lady! And who has ever dared to tear off the veil of a Moslem beauty! Not even England's power, backed by the search warrant of its eighty ton guns, has ever violated the sanctity of their 'peculiar institution!' I'll warrant that there are fifty veiled women on that boat! Poor helpless ones!"

And, sturdy old McIvor Pasha was right! There were fifty women, from painted beauty to obsequious attendant, thronging the canopied decks of the "Sultanieh," or lazily reposing on the divans bordering her gilded cabins. And there were a half dozen officers and a strong platoon of red fez bearing soldiery camped upon her forecastle! Their heavy Peabody Martinis lay scattered around the deck, in true Turk-

ish abandon! Water jugs, biscuit bags, fruit baskets and rolls of rugs covered the promenade deck, where the zaptiehs puffed the cigarette, with their gold-decked officers gravely pulling at the hubble bubble pipes, and ferociously watching the chattering women!

As the "Faraday" swept down through the star-lit strait, Mustapha Pasha stood laughing heartily on the upper balcony of Dolma-Baghtché Palace! He had watched the "Sultanieh" round Seraglio Point, and his heart was light! "If they are on the watch, any of the Christian dogs, or their secret service minions, they will surely blunder off to Smyrna! Now, for the flitting! The Pearl must shine in the orient! By daybreak, we will put out on the foggy Euxine! I'll come back, and Marie shall lead the Countess a dance! The game is mine! There is but one trick more to take! And—the honors are easy now!"

The stout scoundrel dashed the spurs into a Ukraine charger held fretting in the palace court yard, as the escort of a dozen troopers closed up around him! The music girl was listening to the grave old Persian's senile patter, long before Kinsky drew rein at a point a mile above Dolma-Baghtché. Springing from his horse, he leaped on board a heavy steam launch of some fifty tons! It was one of the police patrol boats of the Bosphorus! He strode quickly down into the curtained cabin! The old crone who was the Tofana of the unruly beauties of the harem, was watching over Ilma Falka, who lay extended on a rich divan!

"Can she stand the voyage?" harshly demanded the renegade, as he saw that the captive was lying in a semi-stupor!

"Yes, if not too long on the water! The sea, the motion, will drive away the drug's effect!" answered the hag.

"Give her more, then!" was the rough rejoinder. "I can, but I am afraid!" The old woman tapped her forehead significantly! "I am only going to the

mouth of the Bosphorus to-night! We rest there till the afternoon!" "Good!" mumbled the crone. "I will take care of her!"

Mustapha Kinsky eyed the disguised prisoner with an air of ferocious triumph; "Sleep, you baby face, and dream of what you will wake to!" He sprang on deck! "Cast off!" he ordered in answer to the Moslem captain's low obeisance! And to the twisting of the screw, the stout launch moved up the current of the Bosphorus, her throbbing engines keeping time to Kinsky's leaping heart!

"Hoodwinked! Beaten! Vanquished forever!" he laughed, as he threw himself down on a pile of cushions! "They will never suspect a Royal Police boat, for with the flag over me now, and our doubled red lights, we pass all the barriers freely! There are a dozen of these boats on the night patrol, now!"

In two hours, Kinsky addressed himself to sleep! For the swift launch had swept on by Therapia and Buyuk-déré. There was nothing moving on the guarded strait but a few drifting fishing shallows and the police launches! Out at the fog-guarded mouth of the Bosphorus a dozen steamers lay huddled together, waiting the morning gun, and the proud Turk's permission to make the daylight passage, when all had rendered toll to the bloody crescent flag! For the Krupp cannon sealed the strait!

"I must handle her with care!" mused Kinsky, as the shadows of sleep drifted over him. "Her beauty must not be faded when the Pearl is delivered, and her mind must not be weakened! Else my victory is only a barren one! The road is long! A few weeks of rest will bring her splendor of loveliness back! For this afrite disguise must be abandoned! My Pearl of price must glow in all the proud guise of her court of Vienna! Yes! She will be presented, 'presented at court!' And, she never will forget the presentation! The old woman must note her state every hour! But

one thing would baffle me! Her sickness, the marring of her beauty, or—her death!”

When the renegade Pasha awoke the launch was moored to the shore under the frowning guns of the northern entrance of the Bosphorus. As Mustapha lay on his cushioned divan, in the enjoyment of his morning coffee, his obsequious servants crowded around him, Kinsky was happy, as the old crone had hobbled in to report her charge “Sleeping like a child, and as fresh as a rose leaf!” “Hark you!” cried the renegade, “if you bring her to Trebizond as well I will fill your skinny palms with a double handful of guineas! If you fail in your art,” he pointed to the green water racing by! The old hag hastened away with trembling knees! For she knew but too well of Kinsky’s pitiless cruelty around the kidnapped victims of Ismail Pasha’s woman trap! “This *feringhee* is of princely rank, the others were but beauty rich, the pick of the harvest of the poor!” The old woman shuddered, for within the wall Beylerbey, all knew who had crouched like a tiger on the knoll when the red handkerchief signal was waved! And the crone had seen the “mained rites” of poor Pozziani’s midnight burial; “Allah! But he is a stony heart!” she muttered. And she had seen the grinning swordsmen gather in fiendish joy round Mustapha to tell the story of the death of the *giaour* intruder! They had heartily laughed as they bore away the blood money. The trick was such a neat one!

A gorgeously decked port officer in a splendid barge soon swept alongside, and shortly was in earnest converse with the Pasha.

“Here is your telegram, Effendi! The ‘Abdul Medjid’ will be here at four! I, myself, will conduct you to the Trebizond packet, and so relieve you of the details! All has been made ready for your reception! You have the whole side of the main cabin reserved, and the tent on deck has been dressed for your women! The guard comes, for there are other women sent

on for the Vali of Erzeroum!" Mustapha then handed to the visitor his own diamond gemmed chibouk in courtesy. He gazed out of the window at the procession of Austrian, Russian, Italian and English Black Sea steamers slowly passing down to the examination anchorage ground. His quick eye caught the gleam of white caps far beyond the Asian tower, and the open walled camp on the Thracian shore! The fog wreaths had blown away, showing a rolling, broken sea, with its angry billows stirred up black from the shallows below!

"It seems that a storm is brewing!" muttered Kinsky, in discontent! "As God wills!" mechanically answered the port officer. "The Effendi is right! It will be a dark night!"

Like an eager panther, Mustapha footed the deck of the Police Patrol boat all day, until the old cast off European steamer, "Abdul Medjid," labored up the green, gliding, serpentine current!

"A miserable old affair!" mused Kinsky, as the stout launch rocked under the stern of the Trebizond steamer, where the gilded cryptograph, "Abdul Medjid," replaced the name borne some score of years by the old troop ship.

It was an hour before the whole following of Mustapha's was transferred to the swaying deck of the outbound vessel. Kinsky's hand was lingering on his heavy revolver, as four slaves followed him, bearing the veiled and hooded prisoner up the companionway! A score of faces peered curiously over the vessel's side at the Pasha's strange contingent of slaves, eunuchs, frowsy soldiers and the motley women followers! Three shrill blasts from the steam whistle, then, warned the boatmen off, and Kinsky stood in triumph before the great tent of shawls, covered with huge sails and tarpaulins on the main deck! There were guards at each corner, and a score of frightened women cowered within the temporary shelter. Out into the angry sea the wheezy steamer pushed slowly along, coast-

ing the rough, brown hills of the Asian shore! "She is safe at last!" muttered the renegade, seeking the poop deck, where a few travelers of the first class eyed the haughty Pasha with respectful envy. Armenian merchants, Turkish officers of rank, a brace of wily Greeks and two or three lonely Europeans exchanged glances of distrust and mutual suspicion as the gathering gale drove them down into the great passenger saloon below! Already the salt spray was drenching the two hundred poor steerage passengers who thronged the unsheltered forward deck from forecattle to the barrier of cables, guarded by soldiers, where the women of rank were hidden in the improvised marquée! The wild storm howled in the slackened rigging, and the poor peasant Turks, the knots of filthy Jews, the groups of wild Kurds and restless-eyed Armenians lay huddled on deck, their few possessions drenched already by the rising storm.

But two men, save the officer of the deck, now faced the icy wind which was sweeping over the quarter from the bleak Russian coast, five hundred miles away! The winds from the icy lands of the White Czar!

"Damn this foolish nonsense of separating our Moslem women!" fiercely growled Kinsky. "This bird of passage is used to Sybaritic luxury! If she should be ill, if the storm heightens, I'll have to hide her in the main cabin! No one will dare to oppose me, and I have a half dozen staterooms! Her beauty is my stock in trade! Her face is my fortune!" grinned the renegade! He called the deck officer and haughtily bade the captain attend him below in the great saloon! All knew the rank of the mysterious renegade who carried Ismail Pasha's signet ring, and the ample powers of Seraskier! Mustapha Pasha's active mind had easily threaded every intrigue of the army and navy, and his duties to his multiple masters carried him everywhere, in fort and fleet!

As Mustapha left the deck, a bronzed man with crisp, curling black hair and beard, eyed him curiously! The

folds of a great hooded cloak covered the form of an active man of thirty-five, who stood there alone and held aloof from the motley aristocrats of the cabin. "That fellow has a military bearing!" mused the stranger. "Some starved out German officer who has sneaked into the fold of Islam! A thorough soldier, perhaps; a thorough blackguard, to be sure! The lowest of the low, these Christian renegades! Tools of the Turks, who despise and spit upon them! I'll give him a wide berth! A parvenu Pasha, it seems!"

The solitary man made his way below, lingering a moment to see a great Russian liner of the Volunteer Fleet sweep on out into the teeth of the storm, her blue and white St. Andrew's cross proudly waving in her wake! "Ah! The 'Tsaritza!' If we only had had her splendid decks under us I would be surer of getting to Sinopé! This Kastamuni coast is an ugly lee shore at night, with an old tub and a mongrel crew!"

There was a stalwart, soldierly man pacing the deck of the "Tsaritza" who groaned in rage as he saw the Turkish steamer steal away along the brown headlands to the east. "A week lost!" groaned Soltykoff! "But, the Ambassador may be right! My papers, powers and dispatches must be had from Mouravief! They will surely be at Odessa when I arrive, and the return steamer for Jaffa will enable me to land at Smyrna if Moses and his friends can track the harem there on its arrival. With my official powers, coming from Jaffa, Beyrout, Aleppo or Smyrna as far as Angora or Kharpout, between our many watching friends, I can find her if she is still living! By God! The arm of the White Czar shall reach her! Consuls, missionaries, bankers, telegraph men, secret service, her beauty must reach them by some lucky rumor! For women will talk—even in a harem! Paul will be waiting to join me, and perhaps he will bring the last news from Schloss Falkenstein.

"If Ilma is never found, then I need never retrace my steps to the Danube!" the unhappy lover sighed.

"Perhaps better so, if I fail, for Bela Batthyani and Denton's fair child will rule at Falkenstein! The Major can watch over Magda! It will not be for long! And I can throw my life away in the next war with these same Turkish dogs!" Soltykoff measured the distance to the receding Turkish coaster! His eye caught sight of the two four-inch rifled guns of the "Tsaritza!" "I could sink that fellow now with one good shot!" he growled. And, as the salt spray drenched him, he went below to "a night of memories and of sighs!" For the way was darkened and the night winds sang only of death!

"No one has seen my face in Stamboul! I may pick up the thread of the intrigue by this roundabout return. Mustapha is with Ilma, wherever she is, and no one ever saw me with poor Arpad! Perhaps the blood he has shed has made this tiger drowsy! Oh! for one chance at him, standing at bay!" Soltykoff went below, but his aching heart never told him that there, before his eyes, a helpless captive, the woman Arpad died to save, was being borne away to a shame greater than the world's blackest disgrace! The shrine of Christian womanhood trampled by the brutal insolence of a Moslem libertine!

Midnight found the "Abdul Medjid" staggering along under terrific cross seas drifting the old troop ship toward the rock-fanged shores! The yells of the frightened herd penned up forward had reached Mustapha, lying at ease in the strongly built poop! "Only the rabble! Those filthy dogs forward!" growled the renegade! But the staggering ship buried herself deeply, and the main cabin was filled with the frightened first-class passengers, where polyglot cries mingled in a frightened chorus! Kinsky sprang from his room as the shrill screams of wailing women now rose even higher than the wailing storm! He crowded to the starboard windows and then saw the lights of Erekli, not a league away!

A hoarse voice called him! The captain stood in

the cabin door! "Haste! Quick, Excellency! Your women are all drowning!" The renegade dashed to the open door; "The ship may founder! Take them all in! It is life and death! If we can hold out to Sinopé we are saved! But I dare not go out to sea!"

In one moment Mustapha had made his choice! "The Pearl—alive or dead—shall be mine! He beckoned to his frightened attendants, and then, holding hard, they crept out on the main deck! There, under the rent fragments of the improvised shelter, the helpless women were huddled, clinging to the nearest objects!

It was Kinsky's own brawny arms that lifted the unconscious Ilma Falka and bore her to his lighted stateroom! The dozen other women of the harem tent were dragged into the great saloon, and the other passengers sternly ordered to their staterooms by the excited attendants! The main deck was all awash, and all the costly gear of the Turkish beauties was swept away by the repeated combing waves rolling over the laboring ship!

With frantic yells the soldiery and officers of the harem guard beat back the panic-stricken deck passengers, who were driven below forward at last to the cattle hold!

In the main cabin, the escort officers soon concealed the rescued odalisques in the abandoned staterooms!

Burly Kinsky stood toiling with the tire woman and the old crone in efforts to revive the unconscious prisoner! "Ah!" groaned the two women! "She is dead!" For there was blood drenching the masses of her dishevelled hair! But the pale lips were breathless! The senseless girl lay in a deadly stupor! Her sculptured arms fell back as heavily as lead! And there was now but a faint flutter to tell where her trembling heart beat under the tawdry Turkish splendors of her disguise!

"I can do no more! Kill me!" howled the old crone! "If she dies her blood be upon your head! I am no

hakim!" Kinsky sprang up! "There may be a doctor!" he cried. "Any one! It is no time for folly! Besides, she can not speak! By heaven! she shall not die!" And so, clinging to the side rails, he sought out the nearest officer to be found! "If I should lose her!" The renegade cursed his fate even while every sickening plunge told him that the old shell might founder at the next unusually heavy sea! The boat was now a Babel of the wildest confusion! While Ilma Falka lay in a state of deadly exhaustion, watched by the two women spies of the Pasha, the renegade himself anxiously awaited the report of the ship's "controleur," a hybrid between mate, officer of the guard and purser! "Praise be to Allah! Here is a wise hakim! I know of his works at Trebizond, at Erzeroum and at Baiburt! But he is a Frank, of what country I know not!"

Kinsky's brow clouded! "A spy, a babbler, perchance an enemy! I must find out his nationality!" he mused.

"What are you? Of what land?" said the Pasha roughly, as the bronzed companion of his deck watch regarded him gravely! The tall stranger eyed him steadily, answering in a Turkish idiom better than his own. "I am a doctor, and—of every land where there is suffering!"

"Answer me," demanded the renegade.

"You forget yourself!" gravely replied the stranger. "My mission is to the sick, not to you! I am not your servant! Who are you, yourself? Of what land?"

The two men glared steadily at each other, and Kinsky's eyes then fell. "It is a woman who demands your aid, and you know our customs!" The tall doctor gazed unflinchingly at the renegade whose European cast of feature was plainly apparent. "You are not a born Moslem! I do not care to prate to you of Moslem customs!"

"The woman may be dying even now!" Kinsky said slowly. "Then you may be her murderer, with your absurd pretenses! Call your own slaves! Cure her

yourself! You are offensive, and you know it!" The doctor moved away, but Kinsky laid a beseeching hand upon his arm! "Stay! I will tell my women to make her ready for your visit! You are right! A doctor is not a man, in the chamber of suffering!" Alan Randall gazed curiously after the renegade, who hurried back, clutching to the saloon rails as the old ship rocked in the storm! "Come!" he said. "You are my only help! She must not die! I have gold!"

"I do not seek your gold! Let me see the woman, and leave me with her and her attendant!" The disorder on the ship was at last partly under regulation! The cabins were crowded with the attendants of the harem beauties now concealed in the staterooms! Curtains and shawls but faintly filled the requirements of the stern Moslem code.

In the possible contingency of a common whelming in the midnight waves, pride and prejudice quickly disappeared! "I go to beg the captain to make for Sinopé! The cape is our only shelter from this storm! This old bark will not reach Trebizond in this gale! Tell me if I must land her there! This woman must live!" The energetic renegade, aided by two quartermasters, crawled forward and sought the bridge! A crowd of the frightened voyagers had appealed to the Pasha to demand the captain to run for shelter! They all knew the terrific violence of the Black Sea storms! The shallow inland sea was lashed now to its wildest fury!

"If that sneaking scoundrel holds this woman dear!" grumbled Doctor Alan Randall, "he is the first of his kind I ever met! He may be only a titled trader in human flesh! A palace sycophant conveying his perishable wares to some great dignitary in the interior!" Eleven years had passed since Alan Randall fell under the nameless charm of the East! And well he knew the unspeakable villainy of these European pretenders to Moslem rank!

He forgot all as he gazed at the young woman ly-

ing in a profound exhaustion before him; The marble whiteness of her pale face, and the relaxed limbs, told him of a case of the gravest character! The two waiting women eyed him in sullen fear! A giaour dog! The American missionary doctor glanced at the watchful women! "One guardian fury, and one old worn out Hecate!" he mused. And beyond a simple question in Turkish, "How long has she been sick?" he busied himself with the beautiful patient!

"It is the sea!" mumbled the old woman, "and this!" She lifted the mass of flowing hair and showed a deep cut whence the blood had streamed over the woman's ivory shoulders and stained the piled cushions! Alan Randall's eye had followed the exquisite lines of the sufferer's virginal form! "No Moslem lump of fat!" he mused. "A poor degraded child of Europe! Her only capital, 'the beauté du diable!' The golden, unplucked rose of youth! Is she self-bartered, or one of the stolen!" His suspicions were excited, as he felt the faint pulse, merely a flickering throb, to place his hand upon the half-stilled heart under her maiden bosom.

The sullen women glared at the Frankish stranger in a hostile silence! They had their cue from Mustapha! Only speech was dangerous! The doctor's face grew very stern! He pushed open one fallen eyelid, then the other! He had noted the golden hair gleaming below the dye, when he swept away the sweeping tresses from the severe cut! "Ah! This blood-letting may have saved her life! The violence of the storm, the shock of the carrying away of the tent, the copious blood-letting of this wound! Now, to save her life, to outwit them! It is the coma of narcotic poison!" The veteran of the orient hospitals recognized the work of opium, hasheesh, henbane or aconite. He had seen these deadly arts used before.

The puzzled doctor busied himself with trifling details while his mind was filled with the mystery of the object of this drugging! "To kill her were a loss to

them! To kill herself is to defeat all the purposes of her life! The easy luxury of oriental shame, or the chance of rescue! Is it her own work?" Though the face was painted and fards and dyes disguised her continental beauty, the yellowed palms and finger tips, the Moslem dress could not disguise the unsullied beauty of virginal womanhood! And yet, the young man dissembled.

"There is a monstrous crime here!" the doctor decided, at last, summing all up! He was conscious that the women were watching him keenly. "She has probably been kidnapped for sale! They would not treat a willing victim so! And now, they may lose their investment, or their prey!" While he sat, watch in hand, he had made his mind up! And then he quietly turned his head! "Bring the Pasha to me, at once!" he imperatively said to the younger woman! The doctor stepped out of the stateroom and met the humbled renegade at the door. "Do you wish this woman to live? It is a very serious case!" The American eyed him sternly. "The girl has been abused!" "How! What is wrong?" eagerly demanded Kinsky! "Some clumsy fool has been giving her opium or hasheesh! It may be the harem women have dosed her with the accursed love pastilles! The 'majoon' of India, the 'mapouchari' of Cairo, or the 'dawamese' of the Arabs! She is in a senseless coma! Death is the next step! She must have absolute rest and heroic treatment! She is unused to harem life! Where do you take her!"

The wind then scourged down from Cape Kerempe, making the wheezy old tub reel! "I was conducting her to Erzeroum! To the Vali's palace!" Kinsky frankly said! "She will not live to see Trebizond without rest and intelligent medical aid!" The renegade's voice was beseeching now. "A thousand guineas if you save her life! We will reach Sinopé to-morrow evening! There is a good steamer coming on after us in three days! The captain is afraid of his engines!

I shall debark there! Can you accompany me to Trebizond?"

Alan Randall saw his advantage! "This woman is 'in extremis' now! If you give me absolute control, if you keep these chattering fools away, I will fight the battle for you! It will be over before we reach Sinopé! She will be dead, or on the road to recovery! But these filthy drugs—another administration of them would kill her! She must have absolute silence and repose! Do you consent? I will stay, but only on these terms!"

The renegade yielded to the cool stranger! "I will give her into your hands! Quick, now! To work! What will you have! I will do as you bid me!" "A gallon of the strongest tea that can be made! The very strongest! I must undo the work of the poison! She will be unable to speak for days! It is a complete poisoning!"

Kinsky watched the doctor as he hastened to his stateroom and returned with a compact medicine kit.

"Now! Get the tea! Call away your women, and leave me with her!" There was nothing but calm professional ardor in the surgeon's steady eyes! He entered the room where Ilma Falka lay at death's door! "Now!" grimly said Alan Randall, as he locked the door, and his fingers trembled with eagerness. "She has youth and strength to aid her! The cut on the head will keep them well frightened! The storm has prepared my work for me! First, the caffeine. Baring a lovely arm, the bronzed stranger sighed as he prepared a hypodermic solution of alcohol and caffeine. "If it brings her out of the coma I will know who she is. And, perhaps—I may save her life twice!" When the tea was brought, Alan Randall was on guard at the door! "The color is coming to her cheeks. Her pulse is gaining!" he mused. "They must not see her!" Through the half opened door, he bade them cool the tea till tepid. "When that has been apparently administered, I will relieve her through

the anti-toxines, and there should be consciousness in an hour!" And then, she must feign the weakness of death. Their fear may save her life!" The vessel labored around Cape Kerempe at four o'clock in the dog watch. The storm had partly abated. There was a silence in the cabins where the exhausted voyagers huddled. Alan Randall was watching on his knees beside the girl, whose wondering eyes rested upon his strong, resolute face! The light of reason had returned! "Speak! Tell me who you are!" said the doctor, as he pointed to the door! "Both our lives depend on your self-control now!" And then, he bent his ear to the girl's trembling lips! It was six o'clock in the evening when Alan Randall was hurried ashore at Sinopé by the gratified Pasha. "I must get some medicines! Let her sleep," he ordered. But, the young man when on shore, rushed first to the Indo-European telegraph office!

CHAPTER VIII.

TO THE RESCUE!—COLONEL SOLTYKOFF'S DISPATCHES!

Stalwart Alan Randall elbowed aside the motley crowd loitering at the door of the Indo-European Telegraph Company's office. He had quickly made up his mind to telegraph to the president of Robert's American College at Constantinople. But, his ardor cooled considerably as he resolved the strange disclosure of the night in his mind. "This young woman may be only a crafty adventuress! It is almost incredible that a woman of rank could be stolen in Austria and reach here in such guise! She pretends never to have seen her abductor before. To know nothing whatever of his reasons! I may be entrapped, and this Pasha

would have me butchered!" The young man's heart leaped for joy as he saw an old Trebizond friend, Harry Singleton, at the operating keys. Randall pushed on, into the one back room. "Come here, quickly, old fellow!" he cried. "Give me five minutes, Singleton! This may save one or two lives! No one must see me here!" The doctor's voice was tremulous with excitement. "I may be followed, perhaps even now I am watched!" "I'll soon fix that!" said the cool Englishman, locking his one front door. "How on earth did you get here?" "Storm-driven steamer, 'Abdul Medjid'! Put in on her way to Trebizond! I want you to telegraph to the Golden Horn for me at once, on a life and death matter!"

"Fire away," cheerily said Singleton. "I'm working the Constantinople circuit for two hours!" He grasped a blank. "But, I don't know who to send it to! A Christian woman's life hangs on my promptness! Never mind my own!" The doctor strode up and down the little room. "I wonder has he the fever!" thought Singleton. "Tell me all and then I'll try and help you!" The operator's face was very grave! He looked uneasily at the locked door. "There's a woman on that boat who calls herself Countess Ilma Falka, a Hungarian noblewoman, who was stolen away," began the visitor. Randall never knew how Singleton managed to drag him to the operating desk, and to talk and listen as well, while the key flew under his bent finger. "Go on, go on. Tell me all!" urged Singleton. And then, the astounded doctor soon finished his story. Singleton jumped up and pushed him toward the door! "Get back and do not leave her for an instant! Keep her under your control as far as Trebizond! Be wary here! They might take her down to Angora and hide her there. The whole Foreign Embassies at Constantinople are now working for the woman's life and for her ultimate rescue, through the Russian Minister, Nelidoff! Go now! See all your missionaries at Trebizond and the Russian

Consul! I'll warn the telegraph office there now! We have had a circular cipher from Grafton about her! Stay by her while life lasts! She is an angel of goodness and purity! They would drag her into the harem hell."

"Thank God! I will follow her, till her friends can be rallied!" the doctor cried. "I see it all! They are sending her——" he shuddered.

"*To Teheran! To the Shah's harem! Go now!* I'll soon get a note to you on the ship! You'll have my full report at Trebizond! Remember! Every office has the cipher orders! They will send on all your reports! Go! They may spirit her away from the ship! Be wise and brave! God bless you! Think of our own sisters!" There were tears in Singleton's eyes as he pushed Randall to the door! "Hoodwink them, and get the whole story! It is vital to us now!" Randall hastened to the one chemist's shop and hastily purchased a few piastres' worth of several unfamiliar medicines! Two or three bulky trifles were soon added, and he dashed down to the landing! He was careful to compound a bottle of a formidable looking mixture as the Armenian clerk looked on in wonder! As the boat rowed out to the storm-beaten steamer, Alan Randall gazed at Sinopé's placid bay nestling there under the hilly hook. Anatolia's one splendid harbor was now filled with the "lame ducks" of the wretched Turkish navy!

The huge dismantled fortifications stretched far around to the hills where yet the classic marbles of the old Milesian Grecian metropolis were builded into the patched-up dwellings of the conquering Moslem! The bay was covered with darting caiques and lazy barges, and all around, the red flag with its gleaming crescent, shone out like a blood stain on fort and tower, on mart and mast!

"Oh, that the Czar would loose his Black Sea fleet, and sweep this nest of beasts and pirates as on that November day of '53, when the thirteen Turkish fri-

gates went up in fire and flame!" The stern-faced young man swore an oath as he leaped out of the canoe. "To the death! For the sake of Christian womanhood, I will follow her to the foot of Demavend! She must be saved!"

Mustapha, anxious faced, was found seated on guard before the closed stateroom door! The two women crouched lazily on mats at his feet! The cabin was already cleared of the unwilling odalisques who had been driven from the deck, and, luckily, the harem tent was reoccupied, under the care of the guard! The whole ship's company were busied in repairing damages, and the treacherous Euxine now smiled as tranquilly as a crystal summer lake! In huddled groups the motley third-class passengers were garnering their scanty effects, and drying out their wardrobes of filthy rags! The main cabin was deserted, for the mingled adventurers of the better sort had fled away from the vicinity of the sullen-eyed Pasha, who engrossed all the ship's officers.

"Have you found the medicines?" meekly demanded Mustapha. Alan Randall bowed his head! "I shall need time to watch her, and note the effect of the new remedies! Has she yet awakened?" "She lies in the same condition!" was the frightened renegade's reply. "How long do we remain here?" said the doctor, with an affected concern. "Until to-morrow morning!" the Pasha said. "I must go on shore and pay my official visit to the Governor! I have arranged that the guard will keep all these people out, until I return to the ship. You, alone, are to remain here with my women! If you wish anything, speak to the officer of the harem guard!"

"It is well!" answered the doctor. "The crisis will be probably to-night! If there is no noise; if they could all dine in the other saloon, this one night's rest might fit the sufferer to go on to Trebizond!" The Pasha's eyes gleamed! "It is wise! I will give the orders! And I will return for your report!" Alan Randall bowed in

silence and escorted the Pasha to the main cabin door! He listened, by a mere professional instinct, as the magnate gave the epauletted harem officer his directions! A few last words reached Randall through an open window, whose silken curtains were drawn!

"Watch that Frankish fellow, that he does not talk to the sick woman! You can go into my room and listen there!" "Ah" smiled Alan Randall! "The old harem finesse! Well, I will have to play you a Yankee trick!" He entered the sick room, and closing the door, shot the bronze bolt back to its place! He sat there watching the sleeping woman, whose eyes slowly opened at the sharp click of the bolt! The doctor's warning finger was upon his lip! He tore out a leaf of his note book and wrote in plain English script:—

"We are watched! There is a guard listening in the next room. I will bring you writing material! Do not speak, or show a single sign of life if any one enters! I will return."

There was a single grateful gleam of the beautiful dark eyes, for the poor prisoner's heart beat once again in hope! Alan Randall strode down the cabin to his own stateroom, returning with some folios of paper and a medical book. He ostentatiously opened all his travelling medical kit and turned the leaves of the references one by one, as he wrote away at the deserted dining tables, in front of the door! The two women curiously watched his array of gleaming instruments, of bandages and the lines of scattered bottles! The glamour of Frankish magic hung around his every movement! When he had finished a brief relation of the incident of the telegraph, and written his directions, he folded the papers and thrust the blank folios carelessly in his pocket!

"I think that I am ready now!" said the American, who had noted the gaudily uniformed officer lurking in the shadows of Mustapha's room. Selecting a large flask of distilled water, the doctor found a convenient light pouring in a window across the cabin. Calling

the Turkish officer, the sly doctor busied him with the apparently important task of dropping a vial of medicine, drop by drop, into the flask, to which he had added one or two ingredients at hazard! "I think that will fix him for twenty minutes, at least!" said Randall, sotto voce, as he bade the two women guard all his outspread stores! "Now, I know why I have studied Turkish and Arabic for eleven long years! Now, I know why the path to Teheran is beaten ground to me. It is the finger of Providence!" mused the missionary doctor! He entered the sick room, and covering the closed door with his body, handed the paper he had written to the feeble prisoner. And then standing in front of the door on the outside, secretly on guard, he busied himself with many gravely executed manipulations of his medical legerdemain! The proud Turkish officer was, so far, not half way through his formidable task, and had allowed himself several rests for cigarette practice! Medicine bottle in hand, Randall entered the room, and handed to the sick woman some blank folios of paper, and a half-dozen prepared pencils. Bending over her he whispered, "Write quickly all that you would say! I will secretly telegraph the whole story! I can detain them outside! Hasten for the Pasha may soon return!" There was one gleam of undying gratitude in the girl's liquid dark eyes, and then the cool doctor left her to her task! Her heaving bosom told her strangely met guardian that she knew of the coming attempt at rescue! It was now Christian against Moslem, in a secret duel of slyness! "It is astounding that she seems not to divine the dark purpose of her abduction! Was it only vulgar gain or some brutal treachery—some hideous family secret?" Alan Randall, himself, knew not of the bloody sacrifice of the Red Handkerchief, but, he knew only too well how the Moslem harem haunts are peopled, by fraud, violence and crime, to feed the Turkish appetite for Frankish beauty! And, existing treaties protect this vile traffic. He gravely laid

his watch on the table, and standing where he could see the whole port, through the opened cabin dead-lights, he prayed only for time! He had brought his mystic battery of nostrums to the immediate vicinity of the hoodwinked Turkish officer, and the two women were also aiding him in his lengthened preparations. "I will make a great parade of dressing the cut upon her head by and by! They can then have a chance to satisfy their curiosity, and so report that all is going on well to their haughty master!" A look of triumph beamed on Alan Randall's face as he finally emerged from the stateroom with a dozen leaves of pencilled messages and the whole burden of Ilma's story, safely concealed in his inner breast pockets. "She has her cue now, thank God, and I can trust to her wit to carry out my directions as far as Trebizond! And, after that, we are in God's hands!" When Mustapha's barge swung alongside the ship, two hours later, he strode directly into the cabin. Randall never changed a muscle as the renegade questioned his guard officer! The two women were excitedly voluble in their whispered reports, and then the doctor led the returning scoundrel to the door, where Mustapha saw a pale face bandaged with all the unromantic skill of the doctor, to announce the careful dressing of the wound upon the head! The two men walked out together upon the deck! "Tell me, will she live; will she be disfigured?" The Pasha was startled at the grim array of swathing bandages. "I thought that would fetch him," grimly mused Randall, as he noted a young messenger boy signalling him in the crowded deck mob, with his eyes! "There must be absolute quiet and repose! I will watch her to-night. One of your women can remain in the room at hand, to aid me! The crisis will perhaps be over before we start! But, she must rest for several days at Trebizond!"

The renegade's face darkened. "The season is late! I must get over the pass to Erzeroum, and reach Teheran as soon as possible." Randall's face was un-

moved as he noted the anxious Pasha's slip. He bowed, and waited till the great man joined the captain in his forward cabin for the solace of chibouques and coffee! Then, the lad who had watched Randall's every movement, sidled up and gave him a little slip of paper. It bore to him these words of golden cheer:

"Dispatches received! All friends at work! All news will be waiting for you at Trebizond. All our friends are acting in concert there! *Destroy this.* Singleton."

Alan Randall's naturally vehement nature had been toned down by a long residence in Asia Minor, Persia and the far Orient! He knew the ways of the wily Moslem too well to fancy that he was not under a cross-fire of espionage. The renegade Pasha's face wore an habitual smile of easy contentment! "Thank heavens! I have all her story safe, now!" mused Randall, as the watchful Pasha, with stern vigor, directed all his attendants in preparing for the night's comforts. A perfect indifference to the unusual situation of the patient disarmed Mustapha when he approached the Frankish doctor.

"Do you wish me to call any of our Turkish physicians to your aid? What do you require for the night?" said the renegade! Randall gravely eyed the closed door of the sick room. "She needs only perfect repose!" he answered. "The younger and stronger woman might watch over her with me. She requires but little as she has not regained her speech! The drug has paralyzed her whole nervous system! It will take many days for the effects of this overdose to wear off! But, for the nausea of the violent storm, your charge would have been even now a dead woman! How was such a brutal overdose administered? You surely do not wish to kill her?"

The Pasha's cold eye fell, for he knew that the resolute doctor had easily recognized him as a European, a mere mock-Mohammedan!

"It is the usual jealousy of the inmates of the

harem!" growled Mustapha. "I suppose some favorite found the secret means to try and poison her, thinking she might, in time, be a dangerous rival! No one knew she would be taken away!"

Alan Randall played his trump card quietly. "It will be some weeks, however, before this young woman will be in ordinary health! Any excitement, or over-exertion would surely kill her! Rest, quiet, fresh air and kindness may restore her."

"Can she travel?" anxiously said the renegade. "Yes, if she is treated with extreme consideration! But, you see, she is yet at death's door! I will watch her through the night! I can speak with authority at daybreak!"

"My officer of the guard will be in attendance, and he will aid you," said Mustapha. "I confide her to you!" He moved away, and Alan Randall dropped his head in his hands in apparent fatigue. "You have some sly scheme, my renegade friend!" said the doctor, as he revolved the whole situation. "My professional duties will be made very light, after our arrival. But, I shall see you later, if I have to follow you to Cashmere!" The easy self-confidence of the Pasha was a sign that he had quietly arranged his secret programme while on shore! "He could easily telegraph to Trebizond," mused the doctor. "The Moslems have their own military line! Yes! That's the trick! He will hide her quickly, when once there."

Before the cabin lights were extinguished, the doctor led Mustapha Pasha to the door of the sick woman's cabin! On a cushioned locker, the sullen tire woman lay on watch, her eyes never quitting the prisoner's form! Just a slight rise and fall of the silken coverlid indicated that the semi-unconscious woman still lived. Her once beautiful face was swathed in the artistic bandages of her stranger guardian! The Pasha called his woman watcher out, and conversed, in a low tone! Then, at last, signalling the doctor, he said, "Food! She seems so weak!"

"Ah! You may not be aware that these narcotics

destroy all appetite! Trust to me! To-morrow, she shall be nourished!" The confident manner of the Frank imposed upon the renegade Kinsky. "I am not unused to your women! Mirzah Pasha of Trebizond trusted his mother's life to my knife, and Abbas, the great Vali of Erzeroum, sent to the coast an express to bring me there to save his favorite wife! You are a Moslem of rank! You can ask them!" The renegade winced and walked away. These were the real Osmanli dignitaries; he was a pretender—but a spy, pander, political mouchard and renegade! He dared not brave the petted friend of Mirzah and Abbas!

As the night wore on, the American doctor was left alone at the table, under the swinging light in the deserted cabin! The Turkish officer sat blinking and cross-legged in a corner, and he plied the chibouque with a due disregard of all around him! Randall had designedly placed himself where Mustapha Pasha, from his own pile of silken bed cushions, could watch his every movement, through the open stateroom door! Surrounded with his books, vials, and medical stock in trade, he noted his watch, and made regular half-hourly visits to the sick room! The sullen eyes of the woman on watch regarded him as he bent over the invalid, to whom his touch was only a renewed signal for silence, and an omen of good cheer! The night wore on in quiet!

Seated by the swinging light, the missionary read the pencilled leaves wherein the girl had traced the last lines which might ever reach her friends! Randall's stern face grew stern and pitiless as he read the strange record! He pondered over the situation! "I might give him a medicament! No! It would only sacrifice both our lives! I could strangle the brute with my hands! And, she does not even know him! One lapse, a single indication that I suspect the kidnapping, and I would be at once made way with and she simply strangled and secretly committed to the deep! There is but one course; it is to ignore the

strange surroundings of this woman! At Trebizond I will have all my friends' secret help! But, she will never be left for a single moment in my hands there! Others must save her! My presence would only mean her murder, or her future imprisonment under foulest outrage!" The doctor's tired head fell at last in slumber! He had directed the officer to call him every hour after he had locked away his precious story of the doomed! "I understand Singleton's prudent silence!" mused Randall. "I would have been dogged, and he, perhaps, assassinated, after I had disappeared, on my way back to the ship! This wary scoundrel has set all his traps." Tall, of giant frame, raw-boned and muscular, the young missionary doctor was cast in the mould of a stalwart man at arms. His dark eyes, black hair and twisted, wiry, black beard gave a somewhat military air to the broad brow, the heavy, firm underface and that prominent nose which Napoleon always looked for in his men of action! It was the stern, rugged manhood of the militant soldier of the cross that led him to the arduous labors of the active life of a missionary doctor in the Orient! He had found out his own peculiar field, and in every station of the "workers," from Stamboul to the Caspian, Alan Randall had made a name in the eleven years since he had quitted "Fair Harvard," to serve humanity and religion in the burning East! But, the one romance of his high career had come to him at last! The dawn came blushing over the sea and Alan Randall was glad of all the confusion of departure, for the "Abdul Medjid" was well out of the harbor before the veiled game of wits began again! Pasha against physician!

Two precious days alone remained, and Randall knew that he would be under fire every moment! He saw the hills of Sinopé fade away in their wake, and he passively waited on deck for Mustapha Pasha to open the game! Randall had held himself aloof from all the others, and he now only awaited the appearance of the renegade upon deck after breakfast. The

magnate approached finally with a troubled brow! When he had heard the report of the night, he uneasily said, "Can I not remove her into the harem tent forward? There is great scandal to our religion, in this woman's situation."

"Her life is in your hands!" calmly said the doctor. "The chatter of the noisy inmates there, would throw her into fever, and perchance lead to her death! It is impossible!" Mustapha was powerless to refute this assertion. "Has she spoken yet?" he demanded, eying Randall with furtive suspicion! "Only a few incoherent murmurs!" placidly answered the doctor. "What is her native tongue? You surely communicate with her?" Mustapha felt his awkward cornering, when the physician added, "I have only addressed her in Turkish, and she did not seem to understand! At least she did not answer!" The renegade paused in his walk, and said fiercely: "She speaks no Turkish!" "How do you converse with her?" calmly said the doctor? "She is not of my household!" angrily said Mustapha. "I have to speak German to her!" "Then, I am powerless!" sadly said the doctor, "for, I do not speak German! You must interpret for me, if she is well enough to be questioned, as to her dangerous symptoms!" "Do you not speak the languages of Europe?" suspiciously said the Pasha. "I came here many years ago! Only English and Turkish are my slender store! I will notify you if I wish you to speak for me! At present it would be imprudent! But, before we reach Trebizond, she must be prepared for landing!"

"That is my affair!" gruffly said the Pasha, as he walked away. "Call me when you want me! I shall have to watch over her myself, I fear!" This parting concession to courtesy was not lost upon Randall. "A man without a country—probably a runaway officer," he said, as he went below to take up his mute watch.

It was a ceaseless contest of wits between the two men—a silent game of chess—played for the exposure of one or both, which strained every nerve of the young

missionary, while the "Abdul Medjid" slowly crawled along the great mountains of the valeyet of Trebizond! The Pasha's manner was always watchfully courteous, but, Randall soon found himself addressed by the motley passengers in every known tongue! His uniform replies, in Turkish, at length, disarmed the plotting renegade's suspicions! With a watchful provision, Randall had dropped into the sign language with his patient, to whom food and simple restoratives were now being sparingly administered! But not one single moment of privacy could the ardent missionary steal from Mustapha's officious watch, or the glittering eyes of the two women. The wooded slopes of Trebizond hung over the rocky citadel of the great walled city, a score of miles beyond them, when Mustapha, with affected interest, called the physician away from his watch! "I must now speak to her! The Sultan's business waits not for a sick woman! See! Yonder is Trebizond! I will relieve you of the care of your patient here! Is there anything that you wish me to say to her,—about her future treatment?" "Her life and death are in your hands! She will need rest, intelligent care and an absence of all excitement! With her wounded head, and the effects of this poison still in her system, she is in a grave condition!" The young doctor foresaw Mustapha's probable behavior at Trebizond, and while his blood boiled, he was forced not to betray the slightest personal interest! He thus contented himself with saying, "It will be some months before she will regain her appearance, and usual strength, to say nothing of her beauty!" The Pasha's brow darkened, and then the burly renegade passed into the sick room alone. Alan Randall walked slowly to his own stateroom, for already the walled gardens of Trebizond now shone out before them, with its fifty thousand dwellers clustering there, around fort and palace, mosque and Greek church, squalid hut and princely harem enclosure. The simple personal kit of the doctor was soon made and he was soon again at

his post, watching the door where Mustapha still lingered in charge of the woman, doomed to a fate worse than death! The cabin was now crowded with the overjoyed voyagers, merrily shouting and loudly wrangling over their preparations to depart, as they were all summoned to face the customs. At last, Mustapha emerged from the sick room! Clapping his hands he called to the women and gave them his stern orders in vigorous language. "She seems to be strong enough. She is, after all, a young woman," said the renegade. "Do you wish to see her?" With an unmoved face Alan Randall followed the Pasha into the stateroom. He gravely drew out his watch and then clasped the girl's slender wrist!

There, under the eyes of the watchful renegade, the helpless woman mutely said adieu to the man who had saved her life! There was a world of thankfulness in her sad, searching glances, but, in her heart, was thrilling the secret signals of the man who held her pulse under his finger! She knew that, to the death, he was vowed a knight in her service! Their hearts silently spoke to each other in the parting clasp of the slender wrist! "There is no time to lose!" gruffly said Mustapha. "She must be now dressed for removal! We are already going into the harbor!" A glance from Randall's eyes as he quickly turned his head, showed him a great official barge sweeping out to meet them! And in another moment, the anchor rattled down! Suddenly the girl spoke in German to her stern master! "Tell him that I never shall forget his kindness! I owe my life to him!" The words were slowly faltered, as if a death bed good bye! "She says she thanks you much! That is all!" gruffly said Mustapha, as he pointed significantly to the open door! Alan Randall turned and then cast back one last glance! "Tell her that I am thankful for her kind words," he said, and then he silently crossed the threshold, without looking back. Randall's heart was frozen within him, with rage and helpless terror, when a half hour later a half

dozen blacks bore a muffled and veiled woman down the gangway to the great gilded harem barge, now warped alongside!

He sprung out to the main deck. The harem tent standing there was now empty! The odalisques and attendants had all been bundled on the barge and Mustapha's busy attendants, with frantic haste, were tossing all the Pasha's effects down on the deck of the barge! But, the fretting passengers were mournfully huddled around the crowded decks, there in sullen dismay! Randall spoke to an officer of the boat! "You will be landed in three hours, when we get pratique!" carelessly said the sailor. Suddenly Mustapha Pasha, his sabre swinging at his rich belt, strode back from the gangway! "Let me see your passport!" he gruffly said! "I will leave a purse for you at the Custom House!" And then, Alan Randall knew that Ilma, Countess Falka, was left to face her dreadful fate alone! He madly longed to strike the scoundrel to the deck, and yet the issue of Ilma's life and death depended on his quiet nerve! Without a spoken word, he extended his passport! "You will be treated with every courtesy! I have given all the orders!" was the renegade's reply.

Then, without a word, he strode down the ladder swinging at the ship's side! The barge moved rapidly away, amidst the protesting howls of the delayed crowd.

Though a hundred screaming boatmen hovered around them, not one dared to approach the ship till the barge swept away toward the distant landing, where the sabre bearing eunuchs waited for the barge at the marble steps of the harem landing, high-walled from vulgar gaze! It was the Pasha's privilege of high courtesy to land when he chose! Alan Randall stood there, stunned and his eyes followed the great barge as it sped away! Then he turned and sought his deserted stateroom! His eyes were filled with blinding tears as

he prayed there, alone, to the God of the fatherless to shield the defenseless girl!

For, now, he knew the crafty ruse of the cowardly renegade, and he silently sorrowed, for he feared that he should see Ilma Falka's face no more! The harem gates were ajar! "How long, oh God! How long shall earth see this infamy, blotting out the foot-prints of the Apostles! The brutal reign of blood and lust!" The American only raged in vain! He went out to mingle with the motley crew in their passive waiting, for he well knew the reach of Mustapha's spies! His face was unmoved now, though his manly heart was convulsed! "I will follow on while life lasts!" he vowed! And he thanked God that in the absence of the brute kidnapper he had carefully given to the girl all the plans now being moulded for her rescue! "Oh! To meet my friends; to reach the telegraph!" he murmured, and yet, he was outwardly calm! But it was long hours after, in the darkness of night, that a friendly hand clasped his own on the landing quay! "Come to the Hotel de France! We are all in waiting there!" whispered a comrade's voice. "Useless!" groaned Randall. "We are outwitted, baffled! She has been taken away three hours ago on a palace barge. She is lost forever!" "Not so!" was the cheering response! The Russian Consul has already a friendly spy on that barge, and we can reach her, even in the Vali's harem! We will follow, and save her!" The darkness of the night came drifting down on hut and harem, and a sweeping glance only showed the faint lines of the overhanging hills, and the battered old "Abdul Medjid," gleaming with light, there on the tranquil waters! The passengers had all scattered, and Ilma Falka's foot had trodden for the first time the shore of Asia! The daughter of a hundred Counts was now but a poor, disguised woman slave, crouching in tears, on the cushions of a divan, there, behind harem walls where the cry of innocence is but the sport of the Moslem brute!

"They may be watching! You must not be seen with me!" whispered Randall to his friend. "I have to pass the Customs, so wait there at the hotel for me! Let a room be ready! They may track me!" "All right!" said the agent of rescue, as he vanished in the gloom! When the porters bore Alan Randall's belongings to the barrier of the Douane, three lazy Turkish field officers eyed his passport with an unusual interest! With a courteous wave of the hand, the senior dismissed the bearers of Randall's luggage! Then, as a junior inscribed many hieroglyphics on the doctor's pass, the officers led him into an inner room!

"Please to count this money, Effendi!" said the colonel in charge, handing out a compact little bag. "There should be two hundred guineas!" "From whom?" gravely questioned Randall! "For you from one who is grateful! Never mind the name! Money is always welcome!" The old Turk laughed, as Randall hastily counted the gold!

The American set up three little piles of ten guineas each! "For the poor!" he said, touching his forehead, and breast, in the salaam of Moslem courtesy! He then strode out into the night, and walked, pistol in hand, toward the Hotel de France! "They have had their usual backsheesh, but a scimeter slash from behind might indicate a desire for more!" The doctor could see the twinkling yellow lights far away across the blue, throbbing bay, lighting the prison-paradise where Ilma Falka was immured!

He vanished from sight the moment the hotel porters seized his belongings, and was led into an upper chamber, where a dozen men awaited him! The presence of Kostrominoff, the Russian Consul, Walton, of the Indo-European, three of his missionary guild, and the Austrian Consul, told him of careful preparation! They started eagerly up to meet him! "Tell us all!" said the Russian, after the door was carefully locked. "Be brief! Time has a life and death value now!" The eager circle drew around Randall as he related the oc-

currence of the voyage! There were moist eyes when he finished, and handed the Russian Consul Ilma Falka's pencilled message! The two consuls drew apart and bent over the precious leaves, while Alan Randall was busied with the others! The Englishman was eager in the cause of the entrapped girl! "We have the fullest instructions from Constantinople, and a rescue party will be at once made up! The case is the same here as at Constantinople! Any attempt at public demand, or ill advised action here, would only lead to her murder, or the death of those trying to reach her. Does she know yet of her brother's murder?" The telegraph agent paused, gazing at Randall.

"She does not even know who her abductor is, whither she goes, nor of the vile purpose of her kidnapping! I feared to cause her to attempt her own life! She thinks that she is only held for a ransom! For the brave girl is honest, and unsuspecting of the final shame!" The two consuls called the assembly together! "We will need you, Walton!" said Kostrominoff, "all night, at the telegraph instrument! And we must scatter at once! You, Dr. Randall, and your friends, must travel openly over to Ezeroum, as usual, and go direct to the American mission there! Take no thought of the girl till you arrive there, for the Russian Consul there will advise you of all! He will be warned, and will know of your arrival! Now, remember! You will be watched day and night on the road! Strive to have no air of haste or preoccupation hanging over you on your journey." The Consul paused. "I have made all the road arrangements for you," said the leading missionary, and, while I stay here, Sloane and Randolph will go on with you! They can return at their leisure! You must leave to-morrow, with all due parade of the expedition!"

"And who will watch over this defenseless woman?" cried Randall, with flashing eyes! "I would die to save her!" "Don't be too rash, Doctor!" said the calm

Russian official. "I am going to give you a chance to save her, perhaps even to risk your life in her defense!"

"Explain!" begged the excited missionary, who saw once more the mutely pleading eyes of the Magyar maiden, in that eternal farewell, the speechless parting. "This scoundrel Mustapha evidently destines this girl for a secret sale! Your report tells us that at least three months are needed to restore her beauty! Now, Paul Nelidoff, our Ambassador at Stamboul, is the one head of the rescue movement, and the Austrian Ambassador and Consuls wisely leave it to us! Mustapha, sly scoundrel, will watch all the Austrians! We are a secret league of all the foreign officials of the East! This renegade will get the girl out of here at once! There is but one road, by Baibourt, to Erzeroum.

"There he can hide her in any of the great harems, and have her cure effected by the renegade foreign physicians there! His route from there will determine her fate! Down the Tigris, means Bagdad, but over the Taya Pass, surely means Teheran! There are too many Europeans here and at Erzeroum to keep her long concealed! She would either have to be quietly put out of the way or else sent on farther! The object of Mustapha would be defeated in either case! I have sent out secret agents on the Erzeroum road, and have trusty men to watch at Bitlis and Kharpoot! My Consul colleague at Tabreez is warned by cipher dispatch! My one hope is that the Shah's European voyage has made a market for continental beauty at Ispahan and Teheran! Mustapha will perhaps conduct her there, will hide her, wait and restore her beauty in rest and comfort, and then make his infamous bargain there!"

"But, who will rescue her?" demanded Randall. "Ah!" said the Consul, "Kassim, an undeclared secret service spy, is now on that barge and will follow her steps. There is a fortune in sight for him! Colonel Serge Soltykoff, the Burnaby of the Russian Trans-Caspian army, left Odessa yesterday for Tiflis. He has the Czar's Imperial commission as special bearer

of dispatches, and the most unlimited powers as to money, escort and secret service. An American, Paul Denton, too, has left Stamboul for Batoum, direct to join Soltykoff! The moment Mustapha sets out from Erzeroum, you are to follow him in secret, and you three, mark me, will meet at Teheran!" "And there?" hoarsely cried Randall. "The Russian and English power united will back you, if we can only get Ilma Falka out of the harem enclosure, to save her from the hell of their infamy! For, the timorous Shah would yield, where the Turk would kill her, and then lie about the murder! They have butchered her noble brother!" "I will give my life to the quest!" cried the doctor!

CHAPTER IX.

A MOSLEM CARAVAN!—THREE PILGRIMS TO THE HALLS OF THE LION AND THE SUN!

In an hour after Alan Randall's arrival, the conclave had broken up, its members stealing away one by one! It was reserved for Walton to spend the long night sending on over the clicking key the narrative of Ilma Falka to Paul Nelidoff, at Stamboul, and to Colonel Soltykoff, at Tiflis. The servants of the Hotel de France were busied with Randall's preparations for the two weeks' road journey to Erzeroum!

"I will be the first away, and that fact will, perhaps, lull this scoundrel's suspicions!" mused the doctor, as his head fell in slumber. "But wait, wait, till we are face to face in the open!"

Long before Ilma Falka was awakened by the hoarse cry of the muezzin, the three missionary comrades drew away from the Hotel de France, perched high upon their piled-up cushions and underlying baggage in a rude, unwieldy "fourgon," a long wagon without springs; two zaptiehs, an ostentatious escort, rode

lazily along in front as they climbed the headland, where Trebizond was clustered above the yellows and beyond which the blue Euxine broke in long, creamy surges! The road led up a long ascent toward the headwaters of the Surmel, and the many-colored houses of Trebizond gleamed red tiled below them in the sun. Their servants mounted on stout asses lingered along in the khans and cafés of the road. Loath to leave the figs and cypresses, the flowers and gardens of Trebizond for the snowy plateaus of Armenia and the rugged mountain passes of Kurdistan!

Neither of the missionaries had seen a tall man, muffled in a Persian caftan, his face heavily hooded, who spat upon the dust as they drew away from the hotel. When Mustapha turned away, he mingled with the busy crowd of Greeks, Armenians and trading Jews! "Evidently that fellow was well satisfied with his money; he probably fancied that she was only some theater character, or a beautiful dancing girl, selling herself! He could never have exchanged a word with her, and he speaks no Continental languages! They are all lazy; a set of hypocrites, and he is off to his easy comfort at Erzeroum! I will send on a couple of riders to follow them, secretly! But, the fool knows nothing! He took a zaptieh escort, and they would simply cut his throat if he broke Moslem harem laws! No! He did not suspect! The fellow is a good doctor, however, and I must mind his injunctions! This baby face shall be treated with every comfort until I have her safe at Teheran! She must be in the full bloom of beauty when——"

He smiled and signaled a droschky. "I can get her soon ready for the road! But I must keep her contented! There's always one thing! The fool might kill herself—if—she—knew—what—awaits her!" Mustapha knew the Falka blood of old!

When once within the walls, Mustapha threw aside his shrouding disguise, and pointed to the gleaming harem walls, shining out far beyond the grim fortified

stone barrier, enclosing the main town and the smiling gardens! He eyed the strong forts on the walls, the grim citadel perched on its high rock, and gazed at the wooded heights far above him. "I have thrown them off the scent!" laughed Mustapha. "They are now blundering around Smyrna, a thousand miles away, looking for the Pearl of a Thousand Purses!" He sighed. "She does not look up to her market value now! I must hoodwink and flatter her,—until she is safe at Teheran! My revenge shall come—after the Lord of the Lion and Sun has thrown the Pearl away!" No robber of Lazistan ever scowled blacker murder than Kinsky, as he turned into the harem gate. "If Marie is quick-witted, and I can ever get the mother in my clutches, then I will have settled all the old scores! The last of the Falkas!"

All the long day, while Alan Randall toiled slowly along the beautiful banks of the Surmel, toward the far Zigaria mountain, Mustapha Pasha was busied in organizing a splendid caravan suited to his rank! He smiled as he proudly prophesied, "Once beyond Erzeroum, she has put her old life behind her, forever. For, there beyond the Moslem is king of earth, air, fire and water, and these meddling dogs only live—by our sufferance!" And so many rich schemes awaited him there! His friend, the Persian ambassador, would aid! It was a new world to conquer. It was a proud boast. Yet at Platena, three leagues to the west, the Russian and Austrian Consuls had met, on their afternoon ride! While Mustapha arranged his retinue for the road, the Christian officials conferred in safe whispers! The talking wires had assured them of the movement of the rescue party! "It is quite clear," said Kostrominoff that our friends will be the first at Teheran, if Mustapha moves on leisurely, and this Randall is a game fellow! He will follow him like a wolf on the track of the hunter! We must appear to be absolutely indifferent here!"

The streets of old Trapezus were thronged with

long caravans arriving from and departing to Anatolia, Syria, Armenia, Kurdistan and Persia! As the two Consuls rode back through the semi-European marts and factories, only the scowling Moslem soldiers and the far-shining palace walls told of the deathlike clutch of the Turk! For there were churches as well as mosques in the vast human beehive, and the three American wayfarers far above them, were riding along past scattered Greek villages smiling in the beautiful landscapes, their own churches shining out on the knolls.

Kostrominoff sighed as he bade his colleague adieu. "We have now done all that we can! Kassim will report to me the very moment of this brute's departure! I will surely have Soltykoff's dispatches by to-morrow night! You will then learn all from me! I will come to you secretly! For our hopes, our fears, our whole burden of loving solicitude, is now hidden there, behind the harem gates! Once the guard of these blood-thirsty eunuchs vanishes, then the veiled villainy of the Moslem is impossible! Great God! That a Christian woman should be borne away to shame before our very eyes!" "Alas! my friend!" sighed the Austrian! "It is only by prudence, by our silent agony, that we may hope to save her life! It is the guarantee of the Christian powers that upholds the bloodiest infamy of the nineteenth century!"

"But, the day will come when the White Czar will sweep away the stain which has rested on European manhood since the Byzantine Empire went down in flame and blood, before the crescent. Fourteen hundred and fifty-three is the date of the birth of this Christian shame! Even here, the Emperor of Trebizond held up the cross for nine years after Mohammed II. gazed on the head of Constantine Paleogus. He was abandoned to his fate. It is for Russia alone to deliver the world from this crowning infamy and, at last, to break down the gate of the harem! It is the very cause of manhood, of womanhood, of the violated

laws of the Fatherhood of God and of the Brotherhood of Man!" "The day will come!" said the Russian, devoutly crossing himself! "Let us be redeemed from the common shame in saving this poor girl!" "Amen!" said his saddened colleague, as he rode on in a gloomy silence!

It was two nights later, and Alan Randall was far away in the narrow valley of the Karshut, when Mustapha Pasha's caravan master reported all in order for the road! The renegade was lying at ease in his splendid chamber, and he had passed the gayest hours of dalliance with the gazelle-eyed women of the Trebizond Palace! "Have the riders returned?" said the renegade. "The Christian dogs are far beyond the summit!" was the obsequious answer. "Then we leave two hours before daybreak!" sternly said Mustapha! "There is not a thing lacking?" "My lord shall travel like a king!" the attendant murmured, crossing his arms and bending low!

"Good! Let my aga know and I will have all the women ready! The road is easy!" Mustapha added. "No one must see our departure!" "It is a splendid carriage road as far as Erzeroum. The Franks have no better! After that——" "It does not matter after that! Go!" said the Pasha! "And now, for the girl!" He rose and clapped his hands thrice! "Prepare the women for my coming!" said the mock Pasha, as the aga of his eunuchs bowed and fled away.

Pacing slowly on, robed in the splendor of his rank, Janos Kinsky's hand toyed with his diamond-hilted sabre. "Why do I not leave her here?" he mused, as he threaded the marble passages. "The Vali wants her! He would pay the same splendid price! And, my long journey would be spared!" He paused, even as a slave held aside the crimson silk curtain of an arched door beyond! "No! It is too near! There are too many Europeans! The story of her beauty would be soon noised abroad! And my Stamboul affairs might suffer! I might be disgraced, cast out, if they followed

her here! And then—the future! To play upon the mother's credulity! There must be time! Yes! Then that she devil, Marie, may do her work as an escaped inmate! I would be forced to kill this girl to save myself! For once out of my hands here I dare not attack her! No! The road lies before me! And Persia will be a gold mine to me! My friend, the Ambassador——" And even in his successful villainy, Janos Kinsky knew not whither that road led him! For fate is ever silent, and mortals blind!

The renegade entered the room where Ilma Falka lay upon a divan, under the watchful eyes of the two women of his train! He approached softly and saw her gentle eyes steadily fixed upon him! The beautiful face was still pale and the bandages still disguised her identity! "No one would fancy her to be an European!" thought the delighted renegade! He stood gazing down upon her, and then spoke in the language of her far away land!

"I am taking you to an interior city, where you will have rest and comfort! I can not tarry here! The women will aid you! We leave two hours before day. You will have the Pasha's own carriage! Will you be ready? There shall be every care taken!" The captor was astounded at her calmness, for she simply bowed her head and moved her lips in a passive assent! "Get all the rest you can! They will give you anything you wish! The tire woman will interpret for you! She speaks all the tongues of the Levant!" And the renegade wondered that she reproached him not! But she had learned by heart the lessons of Alan Randall's cautious advice!

As Mustapha slowly walked away he marvelled still at the passive calmness of the proud Hungarian! But Ilma Falka, lying on the cushions there, knew that the women's eyes were always fixed upon her! The blessed two hours with her mysterious guardian had told her that on the long road hidden friends would follow unseen, and that a hundred devoted ones would toil for

her deliverance! And so, clinging to the faith born of Randall's earnest prayers, she closed her eyes and simulated a natural slumber, and its blessed mantle covered her. It was in her sleep that she dreamed again of her mother's outstretched arms! She saw once more Arpad, her gallant brother; Paul Denton, his eyes blazing with love's ardent flame; soldierly Soltykoff; Bela Batthyani, the playfellow of her childhood, and the grave-faced American Major!

They were all with her again in her dreams! For Dreamland is freedom! They hovered around her, her mother's arms were opened to clasp her, she was wandering again in the flowery mazes of "My Lady's Garden," when a hand grasped her wrist! She awoke startled, under the swinging silver lamps, to see the leathern-faced old crone bending over her, while the tire woman sharply said: "It is the time! Arise now! We go forth!" And then, the bitter tears flowed fast in her sad awakening while the Moslem women robed her for a night journey over unknown ways, to a strange land! Her eyes were fixed upon the door, where the burly renegade stood awaiting the quick dispatch of his frightened attendants!

Friendless, hoping against hope, with one last silent prayer to God for mercy, the prisoner went out then into the night! Her knees scarce supported her to the great marble archway leading to the perfumed garden! When she sank back in the carriage her feeble forces failed her, and it was only a fainting, senseless woman who was swiftly driven through the streets of sleeping Trebizond! But even this, favored Mustapha's game of concealment!

There was a man, booted and spurred for riding, seated at a table that gloomy morning in far away Tiflis. Serge Soltykoff's face was deeply seamed with lines of care as he bent over telegrams and dispatches! It was in the headquarters of the Governor-General of the Caucasus that the soldier awaited the one signal which was his summons to take the road! "Denton

will be here in two days! They will hurry him on after me to Baku! I can have all ready! If the scoundrel does not leave Erzeroum, our official people there will move secretly to her rescue! If he starts for Teheran, I can get to Tabreez and meet him, by the Caspian, or be in Teheran before him! He has seen me but twice, but when next we meet, he will know me! I swear it by my mother's grave! I can have all ready when Paul Denton arrives! Ah! Magda! Magda! Will it be two deaths you are to mourn or only one!" The soldier studied a dispatch from Vienna, signed by Fraser Denton. "He has not dared to tell her yet of Arpad's death! And so, Magda lives on in false hope! Alas! We all do! It is the way of poor humanity!" The soldier walked the room in an agony of suspense till an orderly entered with a dispatch! Soltykoff tore it open!

"Here! Let my whole party be got ready! Go down and tell the trainmaster that I will be there in half an hour!" His face was beaming in exultation as he read:

"They start for Erzeroum in an hour! She is safe, as yet!"

The soldier cried, "Bravo! Kostrominoff! Now, for our own hand at the game!" And he seized his belt, thrust his revolver in its sheath, buckled on his sabre, and, seizing his cap and cloak, went out into the gray of the breaking dawn! "It is a life for a life, you bloody dog!" cried Soltykoff! "Yours or mine, for Magda Falka's sake!"

Mustapha Pasha reclined alone in his light fourgon, watchfully eyeing his caravan as the daylight lit up the road sweeping up the Sumel Valley! He eyed the Greek villages with suspicion. "Some Christian fellow might easily communicate with this woman! These Greeks speak all the tongues!" Calling his aga, he bade the driver halt for a moment. The winding road had hidden Trebizond's walls and the reaches of the blue Euxine from their eyes! The motley caravan toiled along before him, with two zaptiehs riding ahead, followed by the servants mounted on asses, the

eunuchs on Persian horses, and a dozen patient camels, which bore the heavy burdens! A dozen fierce swordsmen under the aga watched over the two carriages! There was no sound from the great vehicle where the hostile women watched over the Pearl of a Thousand Purses! "Where is the guide?" demanded Mustapha! In a moment Kassim, the Kurd, trotted up on his wiry pony. "Is the road plain? Do the zaptiehs know where we tarry for the night?" The lean rider bowed and said: "They have my orders! We make three sleeps to the summit of the Zigaria!" "And do these Greek villages border the road for a long distance?" "For two days' march, Your Highness!" said the guide. The renegade bent his head a moment in thought! He saw the crowds of peddlers, children and merchants of fruit and small wares sallying forth at every café and tea house.

"She might recognize a friendly voice; these wily Greeks are all fanatic Christians, and they might easily spy upon me, or else gather to effect a rescue!" Mustapha was troubled, for he was now upon a strange road! "The women are useless to watch her!" he grumbled. "Hark ye! Kassim!" sharply said the Pasha. "Give your horse to one of the men in the baggage wagons! There is room there for the two women servants in the other carriage! You shall ride in that carriage and watch this Frankish woman of mine! Until we are well past the Greek villages! If any one tries to speak to her or to approach her, lop off their hand or head, as you choose, with your sabre! You know the road to Teheran?"

"It is my path by night and day!" proudly said the Kurd! The Vali of Trebizond (may Allah preserve him) has sent me a dozen times to Erzeroum, to Tabreez, to Bitlis, Kharpoot, Aleppo, Bagdad, Ispahan and Teheran! For, I am of the Kurdish mountains!"

"Nothing shall be denied to you if this woman is kept well and happily delivered over at Teheran! Therefore, these two days bide you in her carriage! When

we pass the Greek villages you can ride at the wagon's side! I will have no meddling! Remember! Death to any meddling Greek!"

"The Franks are dogs! My sword has drank deep the blood of the cross-bearing Armenians! I have stamped my heel on their women's bosoms! I go to obey you! I shall answer with my head for my faith!" The Kurd's eyes gleamed fiercely!

In a few moments the caravan crawled along on its leisurely way! For a stretch of fifteen miles a day constituted the movement of a traveling Pasha of rank. Mustapha Pasha leaned back in reassured comfort, as he saw the coast line finally disappear. "No one knows of our departure! It is well! For even the Vali seemed to fear foreign spies! The power of Frankish gold! "Now I'm safe! The road is open to Teheran! Once past Erzeroum, the gates have closed forever behind Ilma Falka! This fellow Kassim is a jewel! He shall be rewarded! He can bring me back by Bagdad and Aleppo! I will have gained secrets of value when I come to Stamboul! So far I am safe, for the fool knows me not! When she does know me she will be long past the power of chattering! There is no escape from Teheran! And Marie shall lead the mother off to meet her daughter in the Greek sea!" And he gloated in his hour of triumph!

Mustapha soon wearied of following the carriage of his captive, his eyes drooped heavily in the morning sun, and he slumbered in peace, while the drivers took frequent rests in the fragrant forests, broken with the fruit-laden orchards and the red-tiled, deep-eaved cottages! "I have the Vali's own guide! A Kurd of the Kurds, the deadliest enemy of the Christians! And this doctor is two marches ahead of us! There is no one to follow!" The Pasha was content and relaxed his anxious watch.

Kassim's rude, harsh voice awakened the captive girl as he sent the chattering women away, and then perched himself on the front seat of the carriage, where

Ilma Falka lay upon thick piled cushions! The curtains were let down on her side of the vehicle, and the frightened Christian woman watched the fierce intruder with a beating heart! It was only when the driver led his steeds down to water at a brook, leaving them alone, that Kassim leaned forward and humbly kissed the girl's hand! The hawk-eyed Kurd had seen Mustapha's team led down to the brook two hundred yards above! The renegade was still comfortably asleep! There was no one near them! The heavier wagons all lumbered along a half mile in the rear! With one hand Kassim gently pressed the girl's wrists down as she essayed to rise! She was speechless with terror! Her lips were parted to scream! "Hush, lady," he whispered, "I am your friend! Colonel Soltykoff's man! Secret service! There are friends following!" The Kurd eagerly soothed the affrighted girl.

"You, my friend!" the gasping girl murmured, marvelling at his words, spoken in fairly good French!

"Yes! I was taken in arms, a mere boy, at the siege of Erzeroum, in the war! I was mercifully saved! I have been to Mero with General Annenkoff! I am in secret service with Kostrominoff at Trebizond!"

The driver came rattling up the bank with his horses! "Fear me not!" he whispered. "I shall be with you two days! After that, to ride at your side! Never speak or look at me! I will find the way! Soltykoff is now at Tiflis, following with your friend, the American Denton! And, the doctor will be soon near you! He went on yesterday and will follow us from Erzeroum! Fear nothing! You shall be saved! Remember, I must appear to be rough with you!" And Ilma gasped, and—held her peace!

The horses were yoked to once more, and Kassim glared fiercely at his captive when the driver, at last, mounted the box. Long before the train halted at sundown, Ilma Falka knew the reassuring pressure of Kassim's hand, stealing under her flowing Turkish

sleeves! And Randall's prophecies of help were now coming true!

They had halted for a midday meal, and Ilma, veiled and encumbered with her swathing bandages, could hardly note the face of the burly renegade as he directed the aga to serve the repast to the women in Ilma's own carriage! The tire woman obsequiously waited upon the captive, while Kassim's fierce-eyed followers, with drawn sabres, walked around the circle surrounding the Pasha and his captive! There was a new hope budding in the lonely girl's heart! In the blessed exhaustion of nature's reaction, the enfeebled girl lay dreaming of rescue, of friends and home, until the carriage rolled within the high stone walls of a Moslem Khan. The brooding night came peacefully down! But, guarded by her women, the Magyar maiden slept in a secret peace that night, for she saw Kassim, the watchful Kurd, lying on the rug before the curtained door! His Persian peaked cap of lamb's fleece lay where it had fallen from his head, his lean, brown face, with the sweeping mustache, was bandit-like in harshness! His shaven head proclaimed his natal creed, and there, belted with his cartridges, he lay before her, his sinewy hands clasping the heavy sabre! In the well-knit strength of thirty years the young man lay there couchant, like a panther in the path! At the slightest sound the head was raised, and the fierce black eyes glared around! And yet, his presence was a blessed guarantee now!

Ilma Falka prayed to her God for the power to assume the stolid vacuity of the oriental baby face! For she dared not now meet Kassim's eyes in the daylight lest the unwitting kindness of her glance might betray her! And, now she knew that friends were gathering around her, only waiting till the moment might favor for a rescue! The sly Kurd had found time to tell her of the friendly Jews who would bear the messages of her rescuers, and of the Trebizond comrades of brave Alan Randall, with the silent help of the Indo-Euro-

pean telegraph! "One single fatal error and all our lives would be lost! Wait, watch yourself, and trust to Soltykoff! He is a king among men! He knows all our movements by the telegraph now!"

And so the girl, surrounded by foes, slept in peace, for the Star of Hope was shining down at last into her darkened heart! There was but one mystery left in her mind! "Arpad! Has he forgotten the sister of his heart?" Alas! she knew not that the gallant boy had already given his life up for her in vain! The doom of the Red Handkerchief was the fatal earnings of his headlong bravery!

The second day of travel over the exquisite green slopes of the Surmel brought the content of Moslem patience into all eyes. The night brought the cavalcade to the beautiful Greek village of Hamzikenj, where far above the winding glens and ravines clad with gloomy pines and beeches, led up to the summit of great Zigaria Mountain! There had been a dozen opportunities for secret converse during the day and Ilma Falka now secretly awaited the arrival at Erzeroum, with a dawning hope! For perhaps Colonel Soltykoff would be near her there, and Paul Denton, the scarcely recognized lover of her heart! And always the face of Arpad, bright, brave, headlong and tender, rose up before her! Her brother would be at her side!

Mustapha Pasha was secretly delighted at the growing strength of his beautiful prisoner! The two women reported to him the bettered condition of the captive, for, rich in youth, the Magyar girl's brave nature rose up, renewed with the hopes of nearing her friends at Erzeroum! "Will they try to help me there?" she demanded of Kassim, with a shuddering hope!

"Ah! Erzeroum is the Moslem hell for Christians! No, we must wait; farther on! I will hear all the plans there! The Jews will come secretly to me! They are everywhere! And the Russian Consul will guard us! But, Erzeroum is the lion's den! The country is far

easier beyond! For the Caspian stretches away to Russian soil at Baku! The brave Soltykoff will have a wise plan ready."

When the train drew out from the Greek village and the sullen drivers began to lead the horses slowly up the long ascent toward the Zigaria, Kassim sprang out and neared the contented renegade! "Highness," said he, "we have passed the last Greek village now! Shall I take the head of the train?"

Mustapha gazed at the great pine forests clothing the blue peaks above them! "I have sent my own aga and four men to the front! There may be some danger on the mountain defile! Yours is the heaviest carriage! Guard the woman! Stay there! For the two servants are mere fools! Do not leave her a single moment!"

Kassim silently touched his forehead and took his place in the covered carriage! Onward they plodded, the renegade always watching his advance guard, and the rear well closed up by the throng of armed retainers swinging along on foot! There, in these hours of rest and hope, Ilma Falka blessed the protecting Moslem veil and Alan Randall's artfully arranged bandages! In the closed carriage there was no one to spy upon her, the driver on foot leading his patient swinging team of the four docile carriage horses! The captive girl even learned to look with interest at the splendid scenery, with its far snow-clad summits, a miniature Switzerland! There were homelike looking châ-lêts, bravely perched among the walnuts, and on, ever on, past torrents and ravines blue with gloomy pines, they toiled upward, until the summit was at last reached in the evening shades! And so far, there was no shadow of suspicion! Ilma's heart rose up!

High above the Levantine paradise they had left, seven thousand feet in air, the travelers camped. Ilma's carriage was soon enveloped in a Persian tent, and draped with rugs and shawls! Outside it, ruddy watch fires burned, and the two score of Moslems bivouacked

closely around their lord and his mysterious charge! It was in good keeping with the renegade's assumption of Pashalic rank that he deigned not to address the woman he was leading into slavery! His own attendants marvelled not, for the Moslem never bends to court or dally with the submissive women of his household!

Ilma Falka learned to admire the wonderful address of the oriental caravan attendants, as they swept on down the Zigaria Mountain over the famed Kūpru Bridge and entered the region of mongrel hovels and filthy roadside khans! The halting place once reached, then, in a half hour, tents, fires, comfortable viands and all the elements of the luxurious Persian tent life were noiselessly arranged! The armed guard patrolled at night, but, wrapped in his great Persian sheep-herder's coat, Kassim slept, sword and pistols girded on, at the very door of her tent-covered carriage! And so, day by day, they plodded down the picturesque Karshut gorge—on beyond Kala to beautiful Varzahan, and rested a day at picturesque Baiburt! It was here, while Mustapha spent the day of rest with the Moslem dignitaries of the handsome city, that Kassim freely mingled with the denizens of mart and bazaar! The captive Countess was glad to wander, in freedom, in the beautiful harem gardens and gaze upon the superb panorama of the three valleys where the splendid citadel, crowned with its square and round towers, the huge lion-like yellow rock around which the city lay in tiers. Something in her heart now whispered of hope, of freedom waiting, and of future joys to come! Ilma was seated on a bench in the garden, her Turkish garb making her a mere repetition of a dozen similar loungers, when Kassim approached, clad in all his gala bravery!

"His Highness demands you both!" he cried to the two waiting women, who waddled away to hear Mustapha's commands.

"There is good news!" furtively whispered Kassim. "The Russian Consul has sent a Jew to me with a mes-

sage. Colonel Soltykoff is at Baku now with his party, and is only waiting our news from Erzeroum! The Frankish doctor and his friends will watch for our arrival there, and when we leave Erzeroum, the rescuers will follow at once to meet us on the road, whither we depart! The Consul has telegraphed to Soltykoff that you are alive and well, and that—I am watching over you!”

“Praise be to God!” cried the delighted girl! “Ah! lady!” Kassim fearfully murmured. “Remember! Your face is covered, but your eyes shine like diamonds! Beware of Mustapha! He has the tiger’s heart! One false step! I would be instantly banished from your side, and he would hew us both to pieces with his sabre if he discovered our friendship!”

“Tell me! Tell me! Why does he drag me away? My friends would ransom me! They would even pay a fortune!” They were approaching the harem door as the Kurd gazed fearfully up and down the walk! “The Shah will give a thousand purses for the lovely Frank, once in his harem walls! They call you the Pearl of a Thousand Purses!” And then, for the first time, the girl knew the foulness of Mustapha’s brutal scheme! She reeled and fell back in the strong arms of the frightened guide! By a miracle of God’s mercy the Russian spy was unseen as he supported her to a bench to rest until she could totter to the shelter of the room where now the presence of the two women, poor and degraded as they were, seemed to be her only protection! And no one had marked her agony!

“Are not all the Frankish women sold?” said the simple Kassim, as he marvelled at her sorrow! “It is always the way of the orient!” For, he understood not the badge of shame.

All that night, dry-eyed and with the noble rage of her race in her heart, Ilma Falka lay awake, gazing at the shadows flickering on the fretted ceiling as the silver lamp swung on its twisted chain! “Death can come to be my best friend, then!” she groaned! “For

I will brave him to kill me! He shall never sell me to a vile dishonor!" In her exhausted sleep the brave, resolute face of Soltykoff seemed to shine down upon her, his lips crying, "Wait!" and her lover, Paul Denton's, eyes beamed a signal, "I am coming!" while Arpad's arm seemed lifted to strike down her foe! Pale faced, but with the nerved heroism of the martyr, the Magyar maiden at last saw Baiburt disappear behind, and then their train drew out toward Erzeroum, where her fate awaited her! But her eyes were now opened to her fate!

In the dreary days of the long march to Erzeroum, Ilma Falka sank into a passive lassitude. Her wearied eyes noted the wild hordes of armed wayfarers, the lumbering arabas, the dreary mud hovels, the crimson red fez wearers piloting the long strings of nodding camels, with proudly tasseled heads! There were fierce looking Kurds, squads of sly Armenians and bands of yellow Persians thronging the great highway as they crawled out of the long valley of the Tchoruk and climbed the rugged Kop Dagħ, entering the watershed of the Tigris and the Euphrates. The sullen renegade seldom approached his captive to converse, but his sullen eyes watched Kassim ever, as he kept his guard! Kassim, in secret, pressed Ilma Falka's slender fingers, whispering "Wait! Be of good heart! Only wait!" There was a ferocious dejection visible on the brow of Mustapha, who had lingered long at Baiburt in grave converse with the cross-legged Pashas who had summoned him! The adventurer was leaving daily his own theater of past triumphs, and his eyes hardened as he marked the form of his human merchandise! "Wait! Wait!" he growled, with his hand upon his dagger hilt! There was powdery snow on the Kop Dagħ, as the wearied caravan crossed it. It was the warning of the waning September days! "Hasten! Hurry on!" growled Mustapha, and he hurried all until the Euphrates led them, stone bridged in its windings by Ashkala, to Elijeh.

It was on the last day of the month that they toiled along the reedy Frat and saw Erzeroum lying on its fortified slopes overhanging the great plain six thousand feet above the sea level! Ilma Falka peered out at the great town which might be either her prison or her grave! There were miles on miles of huge earthworks with huge forts hung high over them on the surrounding hills! The great rampart and ditch loomed before them, with the bloody crescent flag drooping on a score of tall staffs! The great cultivated plain was broken with thousands of graves, and as they dragged along, a party of soldiers, led by a bedizened officer, rode briskly out and surrounded them! Kassim sprang down from the carriage with a last warning glance, as the officer dashed up to Mustapha's vehicle! With scant ceremony, the visitor handed the renegade a sealed letter! In another moment, the stranger had taken Kassim's vacant seat, facing the startled prisoner! With grave courtesy, the stranger saluted in the oriental fashion! Ilma Falka's heart was chilled, till she saw Kassim proudly riding at the side of the vehicle. She had a new master now! Then, entering the works through a granite drawbridge, they threaded narrow streets with overhanging houses and drew up in the courtyard of a walled harem.

Courteously ushered into splendid apartments, the Magyar maiden was assisted by her two women servants, but, though she waited expectant in her lonely luxury, neither Mustapha Pasha nor Kassim were visible! And her heart beat in a vain tumult! And then the horrible thought smote upon her brain, "Was this to be the journey's end? Was the soldiery only a guard of honor, or the fierce watchers of the royal purchaser?"

Ilma Falka waited for the dawn, and conned over in secret, her own last dreadful resolve of self-destruction! "In five minutes, my silken girdle can free me from the touch of dishonor!" she mused, with haggard eyes. The muezzin had called twice from the

high minarets before Kassim appeared! There were two swarth eunuchs squatted at the door on watch, as the Kurdish servitor bore in, presents of the fruits and flowers of the Euphrates valley! "The wagon road ends here," he whispered. "They are now making mule litters, and camels are being prepared! The Pasha is enraged, for he is no longer the master! But your own friends will follow! I have seen the Frankish doctor, and I know now, that we leave in three days! Be wise! Be wary! You will be well treated!"

In the life and death of captivity the three days crawled away! When the women robed Ilma Falka in plain Moslem guise, for her long journey, she was led out into the courtyard, where a splendid litter, borne by two of the superb asses of the East, received her! There was a lithe Persian lad leading each of the animals, and mounted on a splendid charger, the silent Mustapha Pasha now rode alone at the head of a long cavalcade! The wondering maiden closed her eyes as they passed out of the great gates, and it was only by the clash of arms that she was rudely awakened to see a strong company of barbaric troopers formed up in a strong guard of an advance and rear platoon! They had turned away toward the rising sun, and the cavalcade plodded on in silence! The mists of morning slowly lifted from the plain, and the sunlight sparkled gaily on the richly fruited gardens they passed. At the noon day halt it was again Kassim who waited upon the dejected prisoner! The lovely prisoner of rank feasted alone, and twenty yards away Mustapha, with a sullen brow, reclined upon his rugs, and sullenly smoked his chibouque, speaking rarely to the gorgeous young escort officer beside him! There were a few moments of unobserved leisure, while the servants packed up the rich camp furniture and the animals leisurely grazed! Kassim stood on guard, near Ilma, his ready sabre in his hand!

"Listen!" he whispered, "we go now to the Taya Pass, to Tabreez and on to Teheran! This officer is of

the Shah's own court, for in four days more we are on Persian soil! Soltykoff's party are now at Astara, and will go in twos and threes, disguised, by Reshd, to Teheran! They will be there before us and on watch! The Frankish doctor left two days ago for Tabreez! He will leave messengers at Sultanieh to follow on with us to Teheran! There all preparations will be made! You will be rescued! Your friends are at work, far and near!"

"And why not help me in this lonely road?" the maiden whispered. "Because of the hundred soldiers, and to find a hiding place for you in Teheran till you can be smuggled out of Persia! Soltykoff is the last hope! And the missionary will help him! There are three pilgrims vowed to rescue you or die!"

"The Pasha?" murmured Ilma. "Is under daily watch, and you are safe from him! The court officer guards you with his head as a forfeit! Sleep, be happy in hope! I am to wait on you for the whole moon's travel!"

Then the march began again, to unroll the long panorama of rocky pass, rugged headland, great Ararat's buttressed cone of snow, and the villages of hill, plain and river valley, till, a fortnight later, the train drew into the gardens of Tabreez.

CHAPTER X.

FRIEND AND FOE BAFFLED!—THE PEARL OF THE HAREM!—THE SHAH'S ANDARUN IN THE SHIMRAN HILLS!

Colonel Serge Soltykoff was moody as he paced up and down before his tent on the sandy shore of the Caspian, a half mile on the Russian side of the desert boundary line which separates the Russian domain from the Persian kingdom at Astara.

He eyed, for the hundredth time, the dozen tents

of his half company of Tartar Cossacks! The men were squatted closely around the camp fire, as the chill breeze swept down from the silver cone of Ararat, fifty miles away! The hardy Don ponies were bunched together, cropping the salt marsh grass, and the fitful wind gusts now ruffled the shallow Caspian! A dozen miles away, a little Russian steamer was engaged running sounding lines off shore, and the mud huts of Astara gleamed out in a golden brown haze, in the rays of the setting sun! Solytkoff's white cap shone out like silver, and his undress uniform set off every line of his manly form!

"By God! I wish I had remained at Baku," he growled. "There we had at least the telegraph to Erzeroum, and had our daily news from Stamboul and Vienna! Here it is only the hell of waiting for a messenger who never comes! Perhaps the man has been waylaid. Battles have in past days been lost by trusting to a single messenger! The caravan should have reached Tabreez long ago, and it's only a hundred miles from here, and for ten days' march, their caravan will pass along near us, passing down the Kizil Uzen! This is the place to strike across their path!"

Solytkoff turned and called to his under officer. "The horses," he said, "at once!" Striding to the door of a tent, he called out, loudly, "Denton! Let us ride over to Astara again! We will see the Jewish merchant! I think that I will have him send out runners, even if they go over to Bayub!" Paul Denton grasped his revolver belt, and sprang out of the tent, arrayed in full hunter's garb. The young American's face was seamed with the lines of care! He had aged twenty years since that adieu in "My Lady's Garden!"

"What will you do, Colonel, if we miss our secret messengers here?" The anxious lover's face was hopeless in its sorrow. "It seems that the vengeance of hell itself falls upon the innocent! We have lost all

track of the captive! Arpad's blood has flowed in vain! And the Major's dismal budget! Countess Magda in a hopeless melancholy! Italy, change of scene, seems to be the one forlorn hope against insanity!"

"There's but one thing left to do!" slowly answered Soltykoff, as they mounted and rode away, followed by an armed orderly! "We must retrace our steps to Baku, and you and I from there, can get down to Teheran, disguised! This steamer and the brave troops here are all useless if Ilma does not pass near our way! Sending the steamer down to Lisan, if we could make a forced march over to Mijana, then in two days, marching by night and hiding by day, one dash, and we could get her aboard the 'Olga!' If that devil has delayed, or changed his march, of what use are our ready troops, or even the steamer? We can only follow on our quest by going alone to Teheran! At Baku, we could have definite news by telegraph from Tabreez! There's a missionary station there, and this gallant fellow, Alan Randall, promised to have the Anglo-Indian agent there answer any of our cipher dispatches! If she should be sick, or have been betrayed to Mustapha by this fellow Kassim, or have given way under the journey, then there may be no one to rescue!"

"Then both our lives are wrecked forever!" groaned Paul Denton. "The mother half crazed, the child perhaps to share Arpad's fate! But we must follow the quest to the death! Neither Nelidoff at Stamboul, nor all the proffered help at home can aid us! On us is the innocent blood of helpless Ilma if she perishes! And, you must choose!"

"Paul! It is a terrible responsibility for me to decide!" answered Soltykoff. "Of course, I can keep the party and this steamer dallying here for months, without attracting attention! No one knows us, and our Russian frontier forces are always hovering around here! But, to cross my troopers and move down to

Sultanieh, then I must make myself known as an official bearer of dispatches to pass the Persian military posts. This dog, Mustapha, may know me, but, thank God, he does not know you!"

"He evidently studied my face at the opera, and at the Stephans Keller! Don't forget that we have loved the same woman! If he should catch sight of my face on Persian territory it would be the sentence for Ilma's instant death! The concealment of her body would clear him of all possible trouble. I do not dare to make this dash unless we can get in and hide before they get along on the road! Disguised as desert robbers, we could quickly master his weak caravan! As Russian troopers, we could then openly recross the frontier! But, if she is not on the road, then Teheran is our only point to reach, and to get there we must go back to Baku! May God guide me!"

"Amen!" cried Denton, as they rode down the long straggling street of Astara! Soltykoff reined up his horse before a long mud hovel, where two or three lounging Jews, in flowing gaberdines and twisted ringlets, watched over their petty wares! It was the principal emporium of the poor village! An old Israelite, in a velvet skull cap, hobbled to the door! He made a signal to Soltykoff, who quickly dismounted and entered the mean dwelling. Paul Denton followed him, and the orderly led the horses away to shelter! As the tall American bowed to avoid the beams of the low, flat roof, Soltykoff drew him quickly along into a little inner room! There before them lay an exhausted man, with the Israelitish women of the household ministering to him! It was the missing messenger! The old Jewish merchant was gazing at the sufferer, who was clad in a common Persian herdsman's garb! With a warning finger on his lip, he whispered in Russian: "The man is two days late! He was bitten by the deadly Persian insect, the red and black bug—the terror of the mountain wayfarer! He was off his road, and wandering around half crazed when some kindly sheep

herders found him! They gave him doses of the oily camels' and asses' milk! It saved him! And then they brought him here to the Cadi. For the lunatic and idiot are sacred here! He has a message from our faithful Jewish people! Here is a letter for you! In an hour he can, perhaps, talk to you!"

By the one lamp Soltykoff read the letter, and Paul Denton watched the veins knot upon his forehead! "It is the torture of the damned!" he cried! "There is a strong picked company of Persian Cossacks now in charge of our poor darling! And an officer from Teheran has been sent to escort her in safety to the Halls of the Lion and the Sun! Randall will follow on closely, but our last chance of success now is to meet her there! Only an open battle would free her from this officer's clutch! His troop is heavily armed with good weapons, and it is double ours in number! So, all our cherished hopes are vain! Even Mustapha himself has no control of her now. She is the destined prey of the Lion of Persia! They do not trust the renegade!"

"And, are we not men? Can we not fight for her?" cried Paul! "Ah! Read the letter!" cried Soltykoff. "Our attack would simply mean her murder! Even if we overpowered her guard the whole country would rise in a wild mob against us! The rich valley is very populous from Mijana to Sultanieh! No one can hope to surprise a picked company of the First Persian Regiment! They are heavily armed with modern repeating weapons, and they are also uniformed exactly like our Cossacks! They call it, in pride, the Cossack Guard! No, Denton! It is not to be! God has cursed us! And so she passes by our border here, for ten days—almost within our reach!"

The brave Russian groaned in his helpless agony!

"There may have been some sudden quarrel about her. Some strange happening! Let us wait and question the man!" cried Denton! "There is the letter! Read it!" said Soltykoff in despair! "We are baffled!

Baffled by fortune! I will never return to Russia if I can not save this child!"

Paul Denton slowly read Alan Randall's careful letter, and he waited anxiously while Soltykoff watched the unmoved face of the old Jew who labored with the exhausted messenger!

There was a gloomy silence, and the night closed down darkly around them before the old merchant rose at last and led Soltykoff up to the messenger. "He will speak to me in my own tongue and I will tell you all in Russian! The brandy has restored his strength! It is Kassim, the guide, who tells you this! The doctor had gone on, fearful of seeing Mustapha at Tabreez, before our man could find out Kassim and gain his story! Listen!" And the sick man feebly muttered his relation, while the old merchant, turning, told the message of Kassim! The two rescuers listened with bated breath:

"The woman whom you seek is well, and the journey to Bayazid was most fortunate! The march in the Taya Pass was difficult, and so, Kassim had great opportunity to be with the one you seek! But at Bayazid—at the Persian frontier, the officer of the troops quarrelled long with the Pasha! The Persian Pasha Governor at Bayazid would not let Mustapha's beautiful captive pass until the officer showed a royal order, and he only gave back the pass to the Persian officer! Then Mustapha called up Kassim, who had the passport of the Vali of Trebizond, and the Vali of Erzeroum! He demanded the control of the woman!

"'You are in Persia, now!' answered the Governor, 'and you have no papers for Persia! This slave belongs to the Shah's officer!'

"When the march began, after a half day's bitter wrangle, there was another fierce quarrel between Mustapha and the Persian! Mustapha would speak alone to the beautiful woman of the Shah's harem, and then the Persian, drawing his sabre, would surely have cut him in two but for Kassim's prayers!

"I have the orders of the Persian Ambassador in Stamboul!" cried the officer. "You may come to Teheran to get your gold! But the woman is mine till I take her within the harem gates at Teheran! It is my head now or yours! The women may wait on her, the guide can watch over her, but you are only a simple traveler! If you dare to even lift her veil my men shall shoot you dead! This woman belongs to the Lord of the Lion and the Sun!"

The old merchant paused, while Soltzkoff and Denton gazed at each other! "The scoundrel may lose her and lose his head, as well as the price of his villainy!" muttered Denton. "His own hands are tied now!"

"Yes, Paul! Friend and foe are both baffled now! Go on! Go on!" cried Soltzkoff. "We must be soon away! I see the light breaking! I have my plan all ready!"

"Kassim prays you not to follow the caravan! The troops watch over her like lions in the path! There are too many to fight! But, he begs you to go on with all speed by Reshd to Teheran, and to try and get there to wait the coming of the woman! He will watch over her every moment! The Frankish doctor, too, will know all, and he will wait, disguised, at the end of the Austrian Company's road outside of Teheran! He will have all his friends of the American missionaries to help him! If you are wise you will be the first there! Kassim and the American missionary will then find out where she is taken! There will be time, ample time, to make plans, and perhaps the Russian and the English Ministers at Teheran can help you! For, the Pasha Mustapha has no longer any power over her! Mustapha simply hides his head and speaks to no one!"

"Is that all?" said Soltzkoff! "Yes!" slowly replied the merchant! "They will push on fast, for Mijana is the worst infested place on the road. The home of the deadly bug which kills, and they will rest long at Sul-taneh. The Frankish doctor has telegraphed to you

from Tabreez to Baku! You may depend upon this man's truth! I know him well!"

Soltykoff was already on his feet! He gave a hundred rouble note to the old Jew. "Let this faithful man be brought in a wagon over to my camp to-night! He will be taken over to Baku! I will give him a home and a place there! Come, Paul! We must break camp and be away at daybreak! I must get back and signal to the steamer!"

"Where do we go now?" said the astonished Paul! "You will learn all when we are afloat! I wish to take this man away! I will leave my own Cossack with him on watch!" In ten minutes the steeds were racing back to Soltykoff's camp!

The Russian spoke but once! He cried out, as in anguish: "I will save her or die in the harem gates fighting to reach her!"

The Russian and the American sat late into the night in commune, while every man of the fifty Cossacks in the temporary camp was busied with the preparations for an embarkation at daybreak! Down on the beach, a half mile distant, a bright beacon fire burned, and it blazed high, fed with bundles of dried grass, until the Russian steamer lying far out beyond the salty, reedy shallows threw up three answering signal rockets!

"There goes our return signal!" said Soltykoff. "I will send the command down to the nearest point where there is deep water at three o'clock! My lieutenant says that our messenger is now able to travel, and the poison of the Mijana bug has yielded to the powers of cognac and vodki, *ad libitum*!"

"And ourselves!" cried the impatient Denton!

"We will all hasten back to Baku!" slowly answered Soltykoff. "I will send the whole Cossack squad, under Lieutenant Petrovitch, instantly down to Balfrush! The command will be fitted out for a forced march! Petrovitch can easily play off my character of 'Bearer of Dispatches,' and report at once to the Russian Min-

ister at Teheran. I will take all his papers with me! He can receive orders from the Minister to reach our frontier at the line of Turkestan, at the mouth of the Jarian River! In this way the detachment will have an official right to go out of Persian territory at will! At Baku I can easily notify the Russian Minister by telegraph! If our own men reach there worn out, we can leave them and take the Minister's Cossack guard! Petrovitch will be there ten days before Mustapha's caravan reaches Teheran!"

Paul Denton began to see the light, and to divine Soltykoff's daring plan. "Ourselves!" he breathlessly cried! "We will take three or four well armed, chosen attendants from our Baku garrison! They will be of the Turanian Persians from Turkestan, who are absolutely the same in appearance as the Iranians! I will be a Persian merchant returning from Astrakhan, and you my servant! We will hasten to Reshd and push on to Teheran, by Nodeh and Berijan! We can get through the Elburz Mountains and be at Teheran in time to meet this missionary, Doctor Randall, before either the troops or Mustapha's caravan arrives! I will hide in the Legation till you need me! For, remember, Mustapha knows my face! You and the doctor, with our friends, can find where Ilma is hidden. Then we must carry her off at the risk of every man's life, and hide her till we can get her out in the best way!"

"It is a fearful chance! All depends on the telegraph!" murmured Denton.

"Paul!" said Soltykoff. "I have been four times as far as Teheran in the last twelve years! We have all the Czar's plenary powers! The Minister will do all to aid us, but he can not act openly! Remember! An open demand would mean Ilma's murder! And we have also at our back the Teheran Jews, the missionaries, the Anglo-Indian people! As for the telegraph, we follow the line down when we strike the Kiyeh Valley! There is a station every twenty-five miles, and each one has an English operator. There are one

thousand cipher telegrams daily passing over that line! All are handled by the twenty electricians at Teheran, and the Director there has Arthur Grafton's own orders from Constantinople! It is the line used by the English, and I have known dispatches sent out to India, from London, and answered in an hour and a half, over the nineteen hundred miles of the Anglo-Indian! From Baku we will arrange to have daily reports of Mustapha's caravan sent to the Legation at Teheran, and to be given to us wherever we strike the line!"

"Thank God for the telegraph!" cried Denton, as he lay down to rest! But the excited American was sleepless and eagerly waited for the dawn! Before him rose up Ilma Falka's pale face, her eyes appealing to heaven, with her arms stretched to her far away lover!

But, stern Serge Soltykoff, his dreams haunted by the dead face of Arpad, and the suffering woman far away on the Danube, dreamed only of vengeance, a vengeance to come at last!

Before it was light the whole command was assembled at the point where the "Olga" lay in readiness, and long before noon the horses were embarked and the steamer's black smoke was fading far away to the north as she rushed along over the smooth surface of the greatest salt lake in the world! The grimy engineer knew they were racing for a human life—for a helpless Christian captive doomed to shame and death! Before the sun rose the boat was lying under the guns of the frowning forts of Baku! Petrovitch and his men were straining every nerve for the rapid outfitting, and before the sun set Serge Soltykoff whispered his last secret orders to his gallant subordinate!

"Your fortune is made if you save that girl's life! And if you play your part like a man you are my brother to the death!" The bronzed soldier saw the love and anguish struggling on his chief's face!

"Colonel! We will save her or die together!" he said, as he crossed himself. "Remember! Report by

telegraph, and so follow up the line! The Minister will have all our own news!" cried Soltykoff, as the "Olga" swung around slowly and the men gave a wild "Hourra" when her prow was pointed toward distant Balfrush!

The transport captain had promised to land his men in forty hours! The "Olga" sped away, bird-like, on its mission of rescue, and Soltykoff, with Denton at his side, cried: "Now for the telegraph office! And as soon as night falls we will steal out of the harbor and our own boat will land us at Reshd before the "Olga" reaches Balfrush! In three days we will be on the summit of the Elburz, ready to break down into the valley! We will head them off yet!"

"If God wills!" said the haggard American!

"This will be our last appearance in our own characters until we have met that devil face to face!" murmured Soltykoff. "My dispatches to Teheran and Tabreez will tell the Legation of the departure of both our parties! Then we depend on our noble Minister at Teheran! He has already signalled back 'All right!'"

Soltykoff grudged the half hour he spent at the telegraph office, and then he hastily conducted Denton to the rooms in the Governor's house where the servants awaited them, ready with their camp equipage and their Persian disguises! The make-up was easy in a town one-third Persian!

"That Division Superintendent at Tabreez is a hero, Paul!" cried Serge Soltykoff, as he threw down a folded paper! "He has ordered his two linemen on every twenty-five miles, as far as Teheran, to look out for us, and also to report the passage of the caravan! They ride the line night and day! Here is the last from the Minister at Teheran, and from Nelidoff, as well as your uncle! McIvor Pasha is back from Smyrna, and of course he found nothing there. He goes on to Cairo soon! Major Denton says that Magda begins to be-

lieve that both her children are dead! Ah! My God! Even if we succeed we may be too late!

Soltykoff paced the room a moment in a last silent agony. "Now I go to the Governor! He has given me his own launch and a veteran dragoman! I go to Teheran, apparently, to buy carpets for the Imperial household of Russia, and all this official notice will give me state and consideration! I will now hand you over to the attendants! One half hour and then we are off!"

Paul Denton was a changed man when Soltykoff dashed into the room again! His mustache had vanished! His hair was cropped in peasant fashion, and the humble brown garb of a domestic attendant well fitted his stained face and hands! "Bravo! No one would know you!" The Colonel smiled, however, as he held up the diplomat's hands. "Off with your rings! All our personal articles are left here with the Governor! Now I will join you in ten minutes!" He darted off for his own transformation.

Paul Denton stared when Soltykoff, in red fez with green turban, flowing gown, with brodered jacket and flowing trousers, joined him. A girdle with ink horn and writing implements gave a most mercantile character to the man whose soldierly mustache had also vanished in a trice!

"The sun and tan will brown our own stained faces deeper. All that you have to do is to be mute! The servants have all our effects ready! Now, aboard! aboard! It is dusk enough for our disguise to go as the real thing! At Reshd, our dragoman will do the parleying for us! The Consul there will provide the horses at once, and our arms and supplies are of the Governor's own selection! We can trust to him!"

They drove down through the busy, smoky city on the Apsheron peninsula, whose countless millions treasured in the greasy oil springs are a richer harvest for the Czar than the great gold fields of Siberia or all the unmined gems of the Ural! Dozens of

sooty oil works, shabby streets of booths, and noisy dance halls, great ship ways and huge forts testified to the feverish mushroom activity of the mongrel town! Asiatics, Europeans, soldiers, nobles, dissolute men and women adventurers, fierce Kurds, sly Armenians and bold-eyed Circassians thronged the crowded streets where gain and pleasure are the only objects of life!

Even the greasy waters of the Caspian were stained with the iridescent bubblings of sub-aquatic oil wells as the voyagers were rowed out to the snaky-looking government launch. With one dip of the flag to the watching Governor afar off in his stately mansion, the double-screwed yacht leaped swiftly along, as the steersman laid her course direct for Reshd! The two friends stood together gazing out on the lonely waste of waters which stretches nine hundred miles in length by two hundred in width!

"Paul!" said Soltykoff. "This Caspian Sea is the watery jewel of the Russian crown! Every commander on the farther shore now has our mission of rescue at heart, and over this same lake we bring her back, or else leave our bones beyond the Elburz! There is no turning back now!"

And the eager American, gazing on the tideless sea lying there, dropped four hundred feet below the level of ocean, joyously watched the foaming wake behind! Every throb of the screw lightened his heart, for they were now racing on to be the first at the tryst!

"Alan Randall, Soltykoff and I, with Petrovitch, we ought to make a strong enough bodyguard! If we can only succeed in reaching her!" mused Denton! "Thank God for this sudden quarrel between Mustapha and the Persian! The renegade may be forced into the shelter of the Turkish Embassy at Teheran! Has he been really outwitted? Does the wily Persian Ambassador at Stamboul want now to trick him out of the infamously earned gold? The thousand purses! If they seclude Ilma to await the pleasure of the Lord of the

Lion and the Sun! Nasr-ed-Din—then Mustapha is just as helpless as we are! For, they tell me, no outside man may enter a Persian andarun, and the Shah, alone, has the right to see the unveiled face of every woman under Persian control! If we are helpless now, Mustapha, himself, may be baffled, perhaps even robbed of the price of his infamy, for he dare not seek the official aid of the Turkish Embassy in such a mission! For Persia fears both Briton and Russ!"

The rising breeze of night roughened the lonely waters bearing the sturdy "Olga" and the swift launch on their southward way! Denton gazed for an hour at the silent sea and went below, longing for the morn! To see the Persian shore rise up to the southward!

Four days after the disguised rescue parties sped southward from Baku, the wearied caravan of the Pearl of the Harem slowly crawled into mountain-encircled Mijana! Ilma Falka counted the long days, now only by her stolen interviews with Kassim, the faithful! For, heavily veiled, and shut in between the curtains of her litter, it mattered not whether salty plain, gravelly waste, bare brown hills or rocky defiles passed by in the dreary panorama of the slow march toward Teheran! It was easy for the captive to see that the burly renegade Pasha had at last dwindled into a mere passive fellow traveler! For the tire woman and the old crone now vied with each other in flattering her with their slavish attentions! They, too, were quick to note the humbling of Mustapha! The sleek wanton who had been a tyrant over Ilma at Stamboul, now abased herself to kiss the helpless girl's hand! The old crone gazed back at the frightful gorges of Khoi, the ominous ranges of the Elburz rising before them, and the piled up peaks to the north and west, and she timidly mourned for the vanished Bosphorus! The Persian officer, always grave and courteous, was perfectly powerless to communicate with his charge, and now the glad Kassim was the ever ready interpreter, who gave to the Shah's representative the answers gained

through the tire woman's broken French patois! His secret was safely guarded!

"Stay with her! Watch over her with your very life, here at Mijana!" ordered the Shah's courtier! "It is here that the dreadful, deadly insect kills man and beast alike!" When the great tents of the caravan were pitched at squalid Mijana, a dozen strong arms lifted the helpless Ilma to a raised platform builded high up above the ground. She was now bundled up in the black Persian shroud-like web and her face swathed with the quadrupled white veil! It was Kassim, invulnerably booted to the knee, who stood on guard in her tent, where she was watched by the two helpless women, cowering upon piled up chests! For death lurked around them there in the infested soil of Mijana! The Magyar maiden wondered in secret at Mustapha's downfall. For never, in the two weeks since they had crossed the frontier, had her brutal abductor dared to approach her litter, or even to enter the tent now nightly spread! A cowardly captor! But she soon knew the secret!

"There is the bitterness of death between the two men!" whispered Kassim. "The Pasha, unless careful, may never see Stamboul again!" The Kurdish guide made a significant movement, showing the sweep of a headsman's sword. "Wait in hope! In four days we will be at Sultanieh! And the Telegraph Bureau will surely have news for us there. We rest there for two days!"

By the first streakings of the morning light the rejoicing caravan sped out of the Mijana defile toward the broadening, muddy valley sweeping down to Sultanieh and opening into the cheerless wastes of the great Persian plain! They had passed safely the ordeal of the dreaded and deadly insect!

In far away Tabreez, an anxious man now waited in these last long, dragging days for the click of the telegraph recorder answering to the finger of the operator at Sultanieh. This loyal Englishman already had

agents scouring the great bazaars of the old walled city! Every one of the seven gates was also watched, and he betook himself to daily conference with the missionary colony! In vain he had searched the public gardens, and the place of the beautiful "Blue Mosque" for any new comers who might be the secret messengers of the Caspian rescue party! His suspense weighed upon him. The secret agent was fearful of some disaster to Soltykoff's disguised party, as he had waited in vain many days for news! The only signals that he had received were from the lonely advance guard, Alan Randall! The doctor was now nearing Teheran! "This is a town of Turks, and of strong Turkish sympathy," mused the operator! "Perhaps this renegade, Mustapha, has skilfully spread his nets and the daring rescuers have been waylaid!" He groaned in his agony. "My God! if it be true, Randall can do nothing alone, and, day by day, this girl nears her vile doom!" Even the Jews, the faithful spies of great Faröe Moses, had scoured the gold and silver bazaars, the vast arcaded caravanseras of the ancient Tauris, in vain! But, at last, while he was seated alone in the watches of the night, in the mystic old city of Zobeide, the pearl of Haroun al Raschid, there came rattling away on the recorder the clicking signals of brightening hope from far away Teheran.

"By Jove! Soltykoff is a hero!" cried the Englishman, as he began to pick out the recorded cipher!

"Strong party already landed at Balfrush! Friends, too, on the way from Reshd! Telegraph all this news to the operator at Sultanieh to meet the caravan there. Missionary and parties already here on watch around the city. Soltykoff is to be at Casveen in three days!"

"They may succeed! It is one chance in a hundred!" cried the operator! "Now to get this news on to Kassim at Sultanieh! Soltykoff is already stealing over the Elburz and he will be safe in Teheran and ready to act on the arrival of the train! A headlong Russian, and a gallant fellow!"

It was two weeks after the two scowling principals had left Mijana in mutual bitterness, that the caravan, nearing Teheran, dragged into Sultanieh! Ilma Falka counted the lapse of time in her mind every day, and knotted up her grim calendar on the gold-fringed black shroud now enveloping her! "Another fortnight!" the desperate girl cried, "and the gates of the Shah's andarun will open for me! The last chance is Kassim's eagle-eyed hunt for my rescuers! Failing that, death must then be my silent deliverer! My dark friend! His merciful wings must bear my soul away in triumph!"

The girl was worn with desert travel! The Persian court officer had closely watched her veiled figure in the long, weary march down into the Persian plain! Jealous only of Mustapha, the renegade, the Persian now forced the captive Pearl of the Harem to wander, in search of exercise, around the daily encampments, under the guard of Kassim! The wearied women slaves from Stamboul lazily eyed the captive stranger from a distance, as Kassim, sabre in hand, led her apart from the common herd for rest and the fresh air! The fall was closing rapidly down and the streets of the muddy villages were now thickly strewn with fallen leaves! When the domes of Sultanieh's mosques at last loomed up, Kassim approached the captive! "Watch over yourself doubly here! I shall have important news for you! I must manage to steal away from the train! Your European friends must be very near us now!" Mustapha Pasha, jaded and fierce-eyed, relied on Kassim's daily reports entirely as to the captive's condition! "If she should fall ill, I may be delayed here in Teheran till the snows have blocked the passes!" raged the baffled scoundrel! And it then flashed over him that the Persian Ambassador at Stamboul had skilfully trapped him! "He has Marie, the music girl, in his power! She knows of the decoying and murder of this baby faced fool's brother! The Austrian's rank and wealth make that crime a great public offense! The young Count was slain on the

high road! If they should secretly inform the Austrian Ambassador I might be degraded, delivered up and punished, for I am here, under a simple Persian passport, and even if I get the money I may be secretly followed on my road and robbed! I am in this scoundrel's power! He may take Marie the Devil away, and he may claim the thousand purses!" It was with a growing fear and trembling the renegade saw his prey glide out of his hands with the price still unpaid! He managed only his own retinue, but a new solicitude for Ilma's health and beauty daily harassed him! Calling Kassim, as they wound down into Sultanieh, Mustapha bade him ransack the bazaars for fruits and flowers, and for every cate and dainty!

"It is well, Highness!" said the artful Kassim. "Only the beautiful Frank has been three weeks cooped up in the litter! She suffers under the rough travel, the heavy veil, and it will be many moons before she is fit to be unveiled before the Lord of Lords!"

"Go you, and spare not my gold!" cried Mustapha. With a light heart Kassim galloped ahead into the town! Their tents were soon spread in a pleasant garden to which the Governor's officers had conducted them, and all was in order when Kassim returned, followed by several asses laden with spoil! He had brought the choicest fruits and flowers of the village himself to the captive. As he arranged the impromptu feast he whispered: "I have already seen the telegraph operator! Your friends have passed Casveen four days ago, and they will soon meet the Frankish doctor, who is already at Teheran! We will be followed to our resting place, and they will all be ready to act at once! The foreign ministers, too, are working with them! Trust to me! I will find them out. They will have men on watch for me without the walls of the city!"

The cautious Kurd avoided the near vicinity of the girl during the night's rest at Sultanieh! The Shah's cautious officer was busied late at night with the Gov-

error, and the escort was hurried out, at morn, next day, to reach the great walled metropolis of Teheran before a winter storm!

Ilma Falka eyed the endless desert as the caravan swept on over the bleak plains! The iron telegraph poles marked the long line of march, stretching out to Casveen, whence a carriage road a hundred miles in length led to their journey's end! Kassim daily noted the eagerness of the Persian escort officer, the veiled unrest and pent-up ferocity of Mustapha! The whole party now seemed to be actuated by some hidden fear of each other, when, at Casveen, two carriages were found waiting, with an added escort of troops. Ilma Falka, from her carriage window, saw only a desert plain, whitened with the bones of dead animals, and great ranges of brown hills hovering o'er them! The women servitors were her companions as they hurried on, but Kassim rode at the door of her carriage! She had noted him with a secret joy in anxious converse with the two armed riders patrolling the telegraph line, when they daily passed them! In her heart the frightened girl bore but one last, cheering hope! "The friends had all arrived at Teheran!"

The morning came, when before the caravan loomed up the great range of the Shimran Hills, with giant Demavend, a huge silver cone piercing the pale green skies sixty miles away! There were now frequent returning travelers on the road, and troops, caravans and vehicles were all mingled in a noisy press along the narrow causeway! At the last noonday halt the Pearl of the Harem saw far before her a line of outlying gardens and mud huts, a walled enclosure over which rose dome and tower and minaret! There was a vast unknown city there before her, its outlying suburbs stretching far away to the deep gulleys of the forest fringed Shimran Hills! It was the place of her doom! The vast halls of the Shah's palaces loomed up before her! The Ark of Nasr-ed-Din, the Lord of Lords, with its hundred palace halls, and far away, his pleas-

ure haunts in the Shimran! There was the clatter of hoofs and a dozen troopers suddenly rode up surrounding a handsome court carriage! An officer with drawn sword led them, and upon the box of the carriage a gorgeous cavasse, in the red fez and arms of the Turkish Embassy, sat proudly displaying his silver staff of office!

"I have seen one of your friends!" whispered Kassim, slyly, stealing his chance, and he then sprang away from the Magyar captive's side, as a fearful clamor of quarrel arose! It was led noisily by Mustapha Pasha, who was sternly motioned to the carriage by the Persian commander, his scimeter flashing in the sun! "To the Turkish Embassy!" he cried, in a voice of thunder! "It is the order of the Minister! Your own train and followers will be sent to you! My path lies elsewhere!" There was a splendid court official at the officer's side, when the raging renegade was whirled away! At a leisurely pace the captive, followed only by the two women slaves and Kassim, was carefully conducted through the wild medley of Teheran's crowded human Babel, to a splendid palace yard! Kassim had found time only to whisper: "To-morrow we go out to the Shah's own private palace in the Shimran Hills, twenty miles away! The Shah is now far away on a hunting tour for six weeks! You are safe till then! And I will be near you—day and night! You shall be saved!"

BOOK III.—Closing the Account.

CHAPTER XI.

VANISHED!—THE MAGIC CHANGE!—"HANDS OFF! I
AM AN ENGLISHWOMAN!"

Ilma Falka only caught a few confused glimpses of the wild medley of the streets of Teheran after their cortege had entered under the Kazbin gate, and crossed the great market place. They plodded on, past shops, wine houses, tea booths, bazaars and shabby European establishments! The muddy streets were ringing with discordant cries, and the black and violet uniformed police most obsequiously aided the runners in cleaning a way for the court cortege! The busy tram car line and the lone line of European residences of the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs showed a pretension to civilization! There were horsemen, footmen, camels, asses, mule litters, stately carriages and hackney coaches—all mixed in a crushing throng! All were bespattered with the knee-deep mud, now trodden to paste by the hoofs of the beasts of burden!

The captive girl was in a wild whirl of wonder and apprehension. Her bodily fatigue was increased by the reaction of the foul drugging at Constantinople! Her memory was still clouded! The forty days' semi-confinement had left her with but little idea of the road which she had traversed! She had no further fear of any poison or drugging, for Kassim had related the stern injunctions of the escort officer to her two women! "See to her! See to her comfort! If she ails in aught, your two heads shall grin by the wayside!"

The women tyrants were now her abject slaves, for the mighty Mustapha had been unwillingly whirled away as a hospitable prisoner! The Pearl of the Harem was out of his hands forever! And as they wound across the two great oblong squares, Ilma, with wondering eyes, saw the huge palaces and barracks bordering the Tup Maidan, with its parked artillery and huge water tank in the center! The vast Imperial Bank of Persia loomed up before her, and the second great square was thronged with motley troops, slaves and the skirted royal palace attendants, with the fools-cap head dresses! She was possessed by two thoughts only! That whisper: "I have seen one of your friends!" And, those welcome tidings of moment: "*The Shah is to be absent for six weeks!*" As they left all the mingled splendor and misery of the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, the lonely girl's heart sank within her, for the dark purpose of her abductor was now plainly apparent! She knew nothing whatever of the olden family enmity of her burly captor, she still marvelled at the strange voyage to the orient, and, most of all, she mourned over the supineness of Arpad, her only brother, the head of her house! "Strangers risk their lives for me! He, alone, is silent! Where is he?" She could not dream of the dark tragedy of his death, and the sudden need for her transportation far out of European circles! That crime was hidden! Over the great Artillery Square, into the Maidan-i-Shah, the gilded carriage quickly rolled, and she shuddered as she passed by the great cannon of pearls, and saw the clustered guards thronging around the Shah's grand gateway leading into the Negaristan's gardens, in the vast retreats of the Gulistan, and where the huge Ark, or Citadel, massed within its fifty buildings the treasures and hid the shame of Persia!

There was a half hour's glimpse of superb gardens, with blue tiled tanks and fountains, richly fruited trees and graceful mazes of foliage! Into a great court, the carriage rolled at last, and through a fretted marble

door the daughter of nobles entered the slave pen of Nasr-ed-Din! The long journey was over!

A cluster of women attendants, aided by her own now willing slaves, conducted the desperate captive into a room where every dream of oriental luxury was realized! The haughty Persian escort officer, a grave, bearded palace official, and the chief of the women of the harem, conferred without, as Ilma threw herself down in despair upon the great divan in her stately prison room! She was in the Lion's den at last! Helpless and alone!

"She goes to Eshretabad to-morrow!" at last slowly decided the old Director of Imperial Pleasures! "The Italian doctor and the French women attendants there understand the foolish ways of these Franks! For she needs a long rest and repose! It is the only place for her, there in the quiet of the Shimran! And she must be then made ready for the coming of the King of Kings!"

While the captured girl slept the sleep of exhaustion that night, Mustapha Pasha raged, vainly, in his splendid guest chamber at the Turkish Embassy. A wary old Persian Pasha sat cross legged, listening unmoved to the protestations of the renegade! The role of Turkish dignitary sat very uneasily upon Janos Kinsky, for the cool negotiator from the Shah's court, secretly taught, knew well his every cue! There had been colloquy and evasion until Mustapha at last sought the counsel of the Ambassador of Sultan Abdul Hamid! "I care not for your slave! You will be paid well for her! These Frankish women are dogs! They sell themselves and walk with shameless, unveiled faces, in their own lands! You can easily get another! Your pay will come, if the Lord of Lords deigns to notice the thing you have brought! But, if trouble is made for me, I will send you back to Erzeroum at once under an escort guard, without either slave or money! Why did you venture here?" Then Kinsky was forced to reveal all the secret bargain with the Persian Ambassador in Constantinople! "Ah!" said the wily Mos-

lem, "I see now the whole trouble! This master of the harem would divide the purses with you in time! There will be no gold for any one till the Shah chooses! And the sly Pasha in Stamboul, too, will have his share kept back from your gold by his friend here in good time! Your slave of wonderful beauty is far saier than in Frankish hands, out there at Eshretabad! No man dares to touch the Shah's favorites! No man ever enters a royal 'andarun' here save the Shah or his three sons! And even these last not without the queen mother! Go and speak fair to the Pasha! I will ask him to let this Kassim, the Osmanli guide, see the slave every day in the gardens, and he can come and go on your business! So you shall know that she is not taken away from you! And when she pleases the Shah, you shall have your gold, your share, and I, too, will have mine!" So there was a new vulture pouncing down!

Mustapha crept back to the mighty chief of the Imperial "andaruns," and had quickly learned that he had now three active partners in the division of the thousand purses, the price of Ilma Falka's maiden beauty!

He had begged, entreated and even threatened the grave visitor! But, the Harem Pasha simply sucked the amber stem of his jewelled chibouque, and viciously stroked his beard! "You shall have news, daily, by your Osmanli guide! The Ambassador tells me that he is trusted by the great Vali of Trebizond, and he of Erzeroum! Fear not for the woman's comfort! She shall be allowed to rest, and be tricked out, later, in her native Frankish raiment! There are a half dozen more such already in the shade of the Shimran Hills! There are women from London, from Paris, Vienna and Italy! Trust to me! It is my affair now! But no man may gaze on the unveiled face of the Shah's slave! No man, not of his loins, ever crosses the gates of the harem of Eshretabad! She shall be treated as queens are, till the Lord of Lords may choose to give other orders!" When the sly visitor took his leave Mustapha's rage broke out!

"Duped! tricked! robbed! by these three scoundrels!" he raved! "Six long weeks before the Shah returns, and, I am penned up here like a mad dog!" For the cautious Moslem Ambassador had flatly forbidden him to leave the grounds of the Embassy! "There are but three or four hundred people of foreign note here in the two hundred thousand! Every new face is scanned! These Persians are sly dissimulators! Your name and face and deeds are known over the orient!" significantly said the Ambassador! "It might not be safe for you, and it would not be safe for me, if you wander alone, openly, around Teheran! We are cut off here, in the foreign quarter, with all the Christian Embassies around us! And the great schools and college and hospitals of the rich and powerful American missionaries are near us. Russia and England clutch each other's throats closely here, but, both rule the timid Shah, who fills his pockets basely by the bribes of each! One single rumor of an unwilling Frankish slave in the harem and these two great nations would demand her liberation. She would be swept away, and every other Frankish woman now hidden in the Shimran would be butchered! You would then lose your gold! Perhaps your head, too!" significantly said the Ambassador. "There was an occurrence lately in Stamboul—the young Austrian Count who was murdered——"

Kinsky grew pale! He muttered: "I am your slave! Effendi! I will obey you!" For he saw now he was girt with fire! And in his own rooms he cursed the precipitancy of his revenge! "This wily official knows all! Marie has betrayed me to him, through the old Persian Ambassador! I should have made sure of her there! Smyrna or Salonique were better! And the killing of the brother was a blunder! Any thieving Greek would have gladly killed him for me in a chance quarrel! Ten guineas would have bought him a dozen deaths!" When Janos Kinsky threw himself on his couch, he began at last to realize the costli-

ness of that bloody revenge which he had found so sweet! "Damn her baby face!" he growled. "I should have had my will of her, and then thrown her in the Danube!" For he knew now he was in the power of men whose tiger hearts had no pity, no greater pity than his own, and whose sleek craft was beyond him! "I am alone among them, a renegade, an adventurer, and in their power!" Then he swore a mighty oath that he would reach the fair Austrian woman who had scorned him in the past, even if it were the labor of years! The scars of the lash on his back were stinging once again!

It was near sundown on the second day of his Teheran interment that Kassim galloped into the courtyard of the Turkish Embassy! The Kurdish guide was servility itself! He quickly made his report. He was Mustapha's one trusted friend!

"There is every splendor around her at Eshretabad! The two women are with her! She is silent! She wants for nothing! I am to see her once a day in the gardens, and then to report to the Ambassador here, who has already given me his orders, and he will send me back to Asia Minor in a few days with dispatches to Trebizond and Erzeroum! What is your highness' pleasure? I return now to the Master of the Harem!" And Kinsky realized that his servant was the free man now!

When Kassim at last galloped away he was laden with an easily earned purse of gold. Mustapha's quick wit had led him to write his wishes to the Stamboul woman attendant in French! "This fellow can not spy upon me!" the renegade muttered, as he saw him ride away after a half hour spent with the Ambassador! But, neither the renegade nor the sly official would have recognized Kassim after he emerged in an hour from a little wine shop on the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs! He was dismounted, and showed up naturally in the guise of a Persian merchant of small wares! Hailing a shabby droschky, the sly Kurd carefully

made his way to the great gate of the Russian Legation! The sentinel on duty there quickly called an officer of the guard and the disguised guide was shown into the servants' quarters of the Legation.

Kassim dropped all his obsequiousness as he entered a room where four men sat around a table, whereon the samovar and cigarette trays spoke of the usual Muscovite comforts! There, still in their Persian disguises, the stern-faced Soltykoff, and Paul Denton, sat with Alan Randall and the alert Petrovitch, who wore his Cossack guard uniform! They waited their spy!

"At last!" cried Colonel Soltykoff, springing up and drawing the guide to a chair beside him. "Speak now! Tell us all, Kassim! You shall have your weight in gold if we save this girl!" The four men made notes of Kassim's long relation, as he told of the whole situation. It was an hour before he had finished answering all the eager questions of his interrogators! "I won't dare to come here soon again!" said the guide, as he concluded, "but, every evening, at the wine house, I can meet Captain Petrovitch. So, I can have your daily orders! I keep my own horse there! The man who keeps the house is also of the secret service! He is in the pay of your Russian Minister here! We can trust him in life and death!"

"Good!" cried Soltykoff! "And so we need fear Mustapha no more! He dare not go out, and we three must also keep hidden here! But Petrovitch can go anywhere! Now, what do you advise, Kassim! We will send letters to you there, and you will give them at once to the maiden, with materials to write to us! Remember that your own life depends on your care! And, that your reward waits!"

Kassim smiled! "I have outwitted them a thousand times! Listen!" said the Kurd. "They allow her to freely walk in the gardens! The walls are high! There is but one gate! There are many soldiers there, and some secret watchers, too, in the great gardens! But the women are all the time wandering around the gar-

dens in their white veils and hoods, covered up with the black yashmak! They all look the same, but the Frankish woman has the step of a gazelle! She does not now wear the Turkish slippers! I have examined the best places along the walls! It would be easy to get over with a long rope ladder! You could go out there with some Persian wagons and hide near; and if you could get her over the wall you could bring her away here in disguise! It seems the only way!"

"She could be hidden here in our American hospital!" cried Randall. "Hidden safely for six months! We could cut off her hair and disguise her! But that would not get her out of the country! Every foreign woman has to have a separate Persian road passport! A Christian woman raises a mob wherever she is seen! Our own missionary women have to be often disguised as Persians to save them from fierce daily insults! How to get her over the wall, too! People are always thronging on the Shimran roads! Both within and without, if seen, any one scaling the walls would surely be sabred in a moment! All these people are fanatics! They join in upholding the sanctity of the Moslem harem and the Persian andarun! We must work out our plan at once!" cried Denton in agony. "If the Shah should return——"

"It might be too late!" gravely said Petrovitch!

"Listen!" said the artful Kassim. "It must be a woman, or two or three women, who can try with any hope to get into her presence, and then quickly arrange some plan for escape! Now I have found out that only the Russian and English ladies of the Legations have ever been shown over the 'andarun' of Eshretabad! The queen mother has taken some of these ladies of rank out there, and she has even let them see the ladies of the 'andarun' and the singing women, and the dancers! Now, if the foreign ladies would go out there I could manage to warn the maiden! The ladies might find a way to get her out! The Russian and English ladies are both feared and hon-

ored! The others here count for nothing! The Kurds say: 'A woman has a thousand ways to meet her lover!' Why could not this maiden be helped out! The great main entrance is the only way for her departure! To try the wall would only mean the certain death of all in sight! She might be taken out smuggled along with the visiting party! Remember, though this maiden is a great lady in her own land, here she is only one slave in four or five hundred! And, no one would call her beautiful now! They let her roam around at will!

"She is wasted and worn! It will be two moons before she is worthy to be seen by the Lord of the Lion and the Sun!"

Denton groaned in rage! "Poor Ilma!" he cried! "Death is, after all, better——"

"Death for this renegade cur! Life for her!" cried Soltykoff, springing up. "Life and love, yet! I have a plan! Petrovitch, you will take our letters to Kasim at daybreak! I must go and see the Czar's Minister! There is no lady of high rank in the Russian Legation, but I will ask him to appeal to the ladies of the English Legation! They alone can save her! Even if I have to beg the two Ambassadors to go with the party to the harem gates! If Russia and England act together, the girl would be saved, if she threw herself on the protection of the English ladies, after they had once reached her! Yes, it is the last hope left to us now! They must smuggle her out!" cried Randall! "If they could only get her to the road, even for a moment, if the two Ambassadors were there, Persia's King himself would not dare to brave the Russian and Englishman acting together! But, if even ten minutes passed after the demand, her dead body would be concealed, and they would then smile with lying lips and offer to allow your Legation dragomen to search all over the Palace! If a night intervened, the girl would be then rushed away down to Shiraz, and she never would be seen again! No, it is woman's wit

alone that will save her! Once out of the harem enclosure, I will stake my life on hiding her successfully. Mustapha is not on his own ground here! There is but one way! It is this scheme!"

"I will have the Ambassador take me to the English ladies to-night!" Soltykoff said. "We will find means to hide our whole party out there, and so be at hand to help!"

Soltykoff rose and led away Paul Denton into the room which they shared together! Randall, Petrovitch and the Kurdish secret service agent were left seated, plotting over the possibilities of Ilma's escape!

Serge Soltykoff started as he noted Paul Denton's face when they were alone! The young American was in a fury of exaltation! His hands trembled and his teeth chattered as he cried, "That damned dog is here, near us! By God! I will seek him out, and drive a knife through his heart!"

"Remember Arpad's mad folly, Paul!" gravely replied Soltykoff. "He threw his own life away and brought his sister here! His rashness has driven their mother into a semi-insanity! Would you ruin all now? Let Mustapha wait! He is cooped up now, powerless! And his seclusion is our safeguard!"

Paul Denton bowed his head humbly! The desperate lover was terribly worn and haggard! Soltykoff had keenly watched him as they wandered through the shaded streets of Reshd, on the Enzelli lagoon! While surrounded by the hundred Persian officials at their landing, in the official scrutiny at the gloomy old Palace of Reshd, in the camping kahns, at the caravanseras, and through the long days spent in the awful defiles of the Khazan Pass, while they scaled the snow-clad Elburz Range, Paul Denton had held his fears aloof in grave silence! He had learned the submissive demeanor of the supposed Persian servant, but now, in the near vicinity of the deadly foe, Paul's lover heart madly cried for vengeance on their bloody foe!

"No, Paul! Safety first for Ilma! Then you and I will hunt this dog to death, together!" was Soltykoff's last adjuration! "Stay here with our friends! I will go at once to the English Legation with our Minister! If I mistake not, there is some brave woman there, who has the wit and nerve to aid us! It must be done at once, or never!"

Throwing a light gray hooded cloak over his disguise, Soltykoff grasped his revolver and sprang to the door, whispering, "Only you and I must know of the time of the attempt! I will give the future orders to the others!"

The rattle of wheels and the gallop of the Cossack escort told Paul Denton of the departure of the two Russians! It was with astonishment that the doorkeepers of the Russian Legation saw the Russian Minister and his mysterious guest shown at once into the private rooms of the Minister! The night was splendid and the vast gardens of the Legation were filled with merrymakers! The moon lit up the perfumed groves where the nightingale trilled to the plash of the water in the marble fountains! The great palace of the Legation closed up three sides of the vast quadrangle, and far above the splendid campanile rose in the starry night!

Prepared for any sudden emergency, in a city where the great Legations are ever ready to resist a native riot or tumult, where Great Britain and Russia always struggle for the secret mastery of the vicious and crafty Persian monarchs, the English Minister immediately hastened to receive his official friend, his secret diplomatic enemy!

Sir Henry Arden's face grew grave and stern, as he listened to the Russian Minister's few words. "I leave the destiny of this innocent girl in your Excellency's hands," said the Russian. "The Austrian Legation can only support us with its influence, if we are driven to open action! We can not make this a diplomatic mat-

ter! The proofs are in their hands! You know what would follow our public demand!"

"Too well!" groaned the Englishman. "A horrible murder! A hypocritical submission! The proof that she had vanished! That we were, of course, wrong in our surmises! And the Turkish Ambassador would aid to screen their lying agents! 'The sanctity of the harem! The inviolability of the andarun!' What shall I do?"

"Let Colonel Soltykoff plead the case alone before the ladies! It is the cause of womanhood itself! We must not be known in this, you and I, then we can interfere later, at once, to protect the whole party! Our joint Legation guards would suffice! Once that she is safely in our hands, the Shah's Ministers would ignore the girl! But, the whole Mohammedan population, Turks and Persians, are to be feared! We must then smuggle this girl away in secret! You know what Teheran riots are!"

"You are right," said Sir Henry Arden. "I will have my wife call all the Legation ladies together in her boudoir! As for the visit to the harem, there is no difficulty! The queen mother has practically given my wife the official courtesies of the whole royal establishment! If we were to give any notice of our visit, the sly harem officials might seclude the poor child, but I will take with me Major Derwent, my military attaché, and a few men! I will escort the ladies out to the Shimran pleasure region! We can, as if by hazard, leave the carriages with the ladies at Eshretabad for a visit of inspection! So, if the girl is in the garden, our communication may at once be opened! The larger the party of ladies, the greater chance of some one of them meeting her!"

"The Czar has directed me to secretly aid Colonel Soltykoff in this matter! He shall hear of your Excellency's noble conduct! He will acknowledge it!" gratefully said the Russian Minister. "It is the cause of humanity!" said the sturdy Englishman, as he hur-

ried away! In a few moments he returned and led Colonel Soltykoff before his proposed allies.

It was the eloquence of love in Soltykoff's burning words that waked the hearts of the five English women who heard the story of Ilma Falka's peril! Lady Caroline Arden, grave and composed, paled at the recital of the girl's peril. "Thank God! the Shah is absent! When he is here no one can enter the royal 'andaruns' without his own express command through his secretary. But, I have never been denied in my visits to the many royal pleasure houses and palaces! The presence of the official dragoman, the escort of my husband, will ensure our immediate entrance! But it might not be possible to repeat it! Can you not manage to warn this poor child of our coming? We could go out the day after to-morrow and protract for a while our wanderings in the splendid grounds! It will be very easy for us women to linger there several hours! There is no suspicion whatever of our visits."

Colonel Soltykoff explained his plans to communicate in full through the Kurdish spy. One of the younger women then spoke up heartily. "If you can have her walking in the gardens at any time during our visit, I will see her safely smuggled out of the main gate! I know the grounds! I have been there and sketched them! I have a plan!" Serge Soltykoff gazed at the impassioned speaker! When his eyes rested upon the glowing face of the young Englishwoman, he muttered, "Just Ilma's figure and a wonderful general resemblance!" It was the wife of Major Horace Derwent, the military attaché, who spoke with such generous confidence. "Mary speaks Persian and Turkish, and her Afghanistan and Indian residence make her our Orientalist," mused Lady Caroline, as the young wife repeated, "If you can only get her into the gardens, I know perfectly every turn of the walks. Our party must be a large one, and we must also take some of our women servants! I have a permit to

visit the Eshretabad Palace to sketch and use my Kodak! Horace got it for me last season from the Minister of the Royal Household!"

"But, how will you get her out of the gate? There are armed guards on watch?" said the timid Lady Caroline. "Leave that to me! I will not fail! All I wish to ask, is that the Minister and my husband alone share my secret!" "And our party?" breathlessly demanded Soltykoff. "Shall we sit with folded hands?" "There are a couple of wine houses and tea houses near the grand entrance!" quickly answered the quick-witted Englishwoman. "You can have your whole party of four well armed men hidden there! Take a covered araba and hide all your arms in it! Your trusted Legation people can go out with your Russian officer, your captain. He can take a half dozen of his Cossacks! It is the usual pleasure ride to the Shimran, the one road for exercise rides. He can be near the cafe! And you, Colonel Soltykoff, your own disguise is simply perfect! You can watch over our party and be near the gate with your American friend if I succeed in getting your friend past the guards!"

"But how to bring her away?" was the Russian's last query. "We must hurry her away to a safe place! Not either of the Legations, for they might be watched!" replied Mrs. Derwent. "The American Hospital!" cried Soltykoff, and then he told the circle of eager listeners of Alan Randall's plans. "It is the one place in Teheran of absolute safety!" Mrs. Derwent said. "Now, if Lady Caroline will allow me, my husband will come to you to-morrow at your Legation and give you the last details!" Soltykoff rose and his eyes filled with tears as he pressed the hands of his fellow conspirators. The wives of the three secretaries of the Legation had crowded around Soltykoff to pledge their every effort!

When the Russian Colonel rejoined the two Ministers, the English representative cried hopefully, "There is the one woman in a thousand! Mary Derwent will

surely succeed if there is any road open! The soul of a soldier father lives again in her gentle bosom! Count on me! And now, good-night! I'll send Derwent to you to-morrow! Go ahead! We must save the girl! It would be the brand of eternal cowardice on us all to abandon her now!"

Paul Denton and Soltykoff worked until the dawn with the detail of the letters which, an hour later, were hidden in Kassim's bosom, as he galloped away to the Shimran! It was Petrovitch who whispered to the Kurd, "You are a rich man for life if you get these letters through!" Kassim's eyes gleamed as he grinned his mute promise. The stars were shining down upon Teheran's mingled splendor and misery when Petrovitch led the returning Kassim through the guarded gate of the Russian Legation. "Blame me not!" he said. "I had to wait three hours before the maiden could smuggle the letters to me! There are two! I was only allowed to come near her presence, and the two women were also with her! But she bade the Stamboul tire woman tell me that she will be all day in the gardens to-morrow! They now let her go where she wishes, veiled and wearing the yashmak, for the long journey has sorely wasted her! The two Stamboul slaves only follow her at a distance! The maiden is waiting for you! And she has her own secret ways! The two slaves brought me the letters, which she told them were for Mustapha Pasha!"

Kassim concluded, "I have made my daily report at the Turkish Embassy, and there Mustapha still lingers! He is not allowed to leave the grounds of the Embassy!"

"Kassim!" solemnly said Soltykoff, as he gave him a purse, "Captain Petrovitch will go back with you to the café to-night, and you can keep all in sight, as our party go out to-morrow. We may need you to help us. Your daily visit must be over before we go to Eshretabad! But you can join our own party and ride slowly on behind us on the homeward way!"

"I understand!" the spy answered! "My heart and head are in your service!"

There were five men waiting in the Russian Minister's private room when Soltykoff and Denton entered after reading the hastily scrawled letters which Kassim had brought! "All is understood, gentlemen!" said Colonel Soltykoff. "The Countess will be all day in the gardens and will watch for the party, but she will keep in the most secluded places! All the women in the gardens are dressed exactly alike! But the woman you seek will carry a white handkerchief in her right hand! Now, our party will be at the rendezvous, and my friend and I will be lounging at the gates! The nearest vehicle of our party must be the one to hide her! It all rests now upon the mercy of God! The poor girl has the absolute freedom of the gardens, and there are none of the European favorites there! They all went in the Shah's train!" "Major Derwent!" said Soltykoff, "tell your wife that she has a woman's life in her hands now!"

The Russian's voice trembled, as he clasped the young English officer's hand! "I'll not be far away myself," he cheerfully said, as the two Ministers, Randall and Petrovitch left the room, after Soltykoff said, "Denton and I leave at daybreak!"

"I will have my own party out there before noon!" said the English Minister, as he departed with his colleague.

As the sun climbed the eastern heavens and lit up the deeply gorged hills of the Shimran range, the excited Ilma Falka, wandering around her pavilion, feared the betrayal of her own beating heart! For, though she could not see over the massive walls of Eshretabad, the morning visit of Kassim told her that her friends were on the way to the palace! Ah! the help was so near! Her limbs trembled as she moved along.

Kassim had made his morning visit, and his significant gesture told her that all was well! He brought

an offering of fruits and flowers, and while he waited for the Stamboul slave to bring back her mistress' message, he stood before her with his turban in his hand, showing the shaven head of the Moslem! It was the agreed on signal! Ilma Falka cast her eyes to far Demavend! The noon-tide shadows were already sweeping round the giant cone to the north! Kassim slowly retreated down the path and then passed out of the main gate of the superb royal lodge! He strained his eyes as he mounted his steed! Far down the road, sloping away, he could see the flash of uniforms, and behind them three or four carriages! "They are coming!" he cried, as he turned away from the great gates of Kasr-i-Kajar! There a dozen guards were lolling about under the arch, where the Lion and Sun flared in yellow on the green background of the royal ensign of Persia! "Now for the Jewish peddlers!" he muttered, as he galloped away, "and, the beggars!" He never drew rein till he reached a shaded wine house on the broad avenue, shaded with its willows and poplars. There were two or three arabas drawn up under the shade, with a couple of closed droschkys, and horses were tethered around the yard! As Kassim sprang from his horse, he called to an old Jew, pack on back, who was the central figure of a knot of beggars and small merchants. In a low voice, Kassim gave a signal and the motley band then trudged away slowly, as the splendid carriages of the English Legation flashed by! Kassim watched the cortege with its escort of a dozen troopers, Major Horace Derwent gallop leading in all his staff regalia!

The Kurd approached a tall Persian who was earnestly gazing on the splendid sweep of the hills from Vanek to Kamaranieh! There was a circle of twenty miles of splendid pleasure resorts, palaces, shooting boxes in view, and all the summer homes of the foreigners and nobles! Kassim touched the man's arm! It was the chief of the rescuers! "They have gone in, at the gates! The escort and first carriage has

now gone on!" As he spoke, the Russian Minister also swept by in his splendid equipage, followed by twenty Cossacks! It seemed to be a gala day of outings! And then Soltykoff, followed by his servant, a watchful shadow, strolled out of the motley throng crowding the rural retreat! In a few moments there were a half dozen queer looking vehicles leisurely crawling along the great battlemented mud walls of the Kasr-i-Kajar. Soltykoff eyed the open entrance of the splendid gardens, where the white marble walls of the "andarun" rose above the trees beyond the garden walls! A few laughing soldiers were chaffering with some Jewish peddlers at the gate, and a half dozen beggars hovered around there with outstretched palms! "Farœe Moses' friends are loyal!" muttered Denton, as he clutched Soltykoff's hands in a last eager grasp! He had seen the cross-legged officers of the guard toying with the hubble bubble in their retreat by the walls! A group of ladies, led by a glittering officer, were standing within in the great courtyard, awaiting the women conductors to lead them into the harem! There were two of the Legation carriages drawn up before the fatal gate in the shade under the frowning walls! When Soltykoff's carriage turned after passing a quarter of a mile, and slowly moved back down the road, the two men sat in silence, with their eyes glued on the entrance! Their concealed arms were in readiness, and Soltykoff alone knew that the tall, green turbaned Mollah, lingering with the hangers-on at the gate, was Kassim, his face bound up in a green handkerchief. It was but a stone's throw from the entrance that Soltykoff's carriage was stopped for some time by a passing caravan and a throng of varied vehicles! The driver drew out of the road and the two men left the vehicle!

Paul Denton, in a strained voice, whispered huskily, "All our people are hovering around here now! The ladies have been a half an hour within! Will they never come?" And so, waiting with beating hearts,

they prayed God that Mary Derwent might succeed in reaching the wanderer in the gardens!

"If we should fail!" muttered Paul! "Silence!" hisses Soltykoff. "One of the Legation carriages is drawing up to the gateway! Some one is coming out!"

The stolid-eyed soldiers on watch had dragged up into a lazy line in salute, when the mighty English Minister, preceded by his glittering dragoman, had called for the officer of the guard! There was great hurrying and shouting and clapping of hands, as the half dozen ladies of the Legation party were obsequiously shown into the great ante-rooms of the palace, followed by their servants, bearing shawls and all the burdens of Frankish womanhood! "Christian dogs! These gïaours go with faces shamelessly unveiled!" muttered the captain of the guard, when the chief women of the harem led away the visitors. One of the ladies attracted their lazy glances, as, followed by her English servant bearing a tripod, she disappeared in the flower shaded garden walks, carrying a square mahogany box in her slender hand! The young Englishwoman was most shapely of figure, and her face was modestly veiled with double folds of rose colored gauze! Her long flowing cape ulster covered her from the sullen glances of the officers! "It is the magic picture machine!" said the second officer! "These Franks are very devils!" In the coming and going of the hundred servants of the palace, the two officers, drawing in the thin blue smoke of the hubble bubble, leaned back, watching, on their cushions, as the soldiers carefully scanned each entering new comer!

There was silence in the splendid tangles of the gardens, where the roses, irises and lilies bloomed, as Mary Derwent sped along, with her eager eyes scanning every arbor and tangled vine-shaded nook. Suddenly, at a hundred paces from her, a woman's form, shrouded in black, turned the angle of a dense thicket! There was no shuffling, waddling Moslem beneath the

impervious disguise! For, the stranger sped forward to meet her with a springy step! And, in her hand she held a white handkerchief, gleaming like silver shining out against the dark, shroud-like garment she wore. Mary Derwent sprang forward as swift as Camilla, and one hand drew the stranger into a thick clump of cypress! There was no one in sight! "Quick! quick! for God's sake! Throw off your yashmak and veil!" The Englishwoman had quickly stripped her ulster, and torn off her hat and veil! "Now, follow my woman! Take this box, and go after her without a glance right or left! Don't speak! God bless you! Go!"

While the beautiful young English wife was unveiled for a single moment, her golden hair glittered in the sun! Her blue eyes shone with dauntless bravery, and, standing there alone, it seemed as if her heart would leap out of her bosom! With the practice of many a merry oriental masquerade, she rapidly adjusted the long yashmak and twisted the Persian veil around her head. She forgot not to carry the handkerchief boldly displayed in her own hand! Then gathering up the flowing end of the black shroud, she hurried, hidden in the shaded edge of the walk, back toward the end of the long avenue, from whence she could see the great gate!

There were the two women now approaching it! The sunlight gleamed on the yellow box carried by the taller! The other still held the camera tripod, and they passed under the gate in a moment! Mary Derwent prayed to God as the two distant forms were lost in the great arch! And now, her pulse throbbed as if each heart beat were her last. Her knees trembled as she crouched in the shrubbery, her staring eyes fixed on that yawning gate! All was silence! There was no outcry yet, and it seemed an age until a knot of idle soldiers sauntered in again, their gaudy uniforms gaily lighting up the semi-circular sweep of the entrance! The ruse had succeeded! Ilma had passed the gate! "Will they never come back," murmured

the woman, left alone in these splendid shades! For she waited now only for a trusted companion of her party to find her in the gardens! "They are probably in the harem still! Lady Caroline has promised to send her servants and the secretary's wife out to meet me!" As she stood watching suddenly her arms were roughly seized, and a harsh voice cried in lingua Franca, "Come! You are wanted!" It was a fierce eyed woman attendant. Then, throwing off her veil and yashmak, Mary Derwent shook off the intruder! "*Hands off!*" she cried. "*I am an Englishwoman!*"

CHAPTER XII.

A LOST PEARL OF PRICE!—MUSTAPHA'S PERIL!— NO THOROUGHFARE.

The woman servant who had watched over Ilma Falka for two long months gazed for a moment in blank astonishment at the resolute, glowing face and flashing blue eyes of the young English patrician! Mary Derwent's fighting blood was up, and a beautiful scorn lit up her rosy face! The blue eyes and waving golden hair were to the other a warrant of the powers of witchcraft! "It is the work of Sheitan!" cried the frightened harem slave, as she snatched up the cast-off disguise and fled away to hiding! Her own head was now in peril. Mary Derwent sprang forward eagerly, as one of the English Legation's maids came hurrying down the avenue with burdened arms! There was no one in sight! The deed was as yet undiscovered by the guards! "Quick, Betsy, here!" called her mistress, and in a few moments Mrs. Derwent stepped out of the coppice with her head covered with a neat English turban, and a filmy veil covered her features. A long gray wrap gave her quite the air of the Frankish lady again. "Take me to join them,

quickly! Where are they all?" said the agitated woman diplomat, hurrying toward the palace from a side pathway! "They are all now in the court yard of the ladies' harem, ma'am," said the demure English servantress. "Such larky costumes, and such dancing! Those poor heathen women!"

The Major's wife soon crossed the great area unperceived and entered the guarded portal where Lady Caroline Arden now waited, her face whitened to ashes. Mary Derwent pressed her friend's hand! "She has a good half hour start!" the brave little wife whispered. "There is no alarm yet! No one was in sight! We must linger here as long as possible! Have you heard from Sir Henry's carriage?" "Not yet," faintly rejoined the frightened Ambassadors. "Oh! if he would only come! I am afraid of these wretches!"

Then Mary Derwent's eyes flashed fire. "The shadow of England's flag is over us all, even here! They would not dare to touch a single hair of our heads!" "Ah! remember Sir Louis Cavagnari and Cabul!" whispered Lady Caroline: "Take me around now to see the harem ladies, and delay as much as possible here," was the answer of the undaunted rescuer! She was counting every minute now, for a human life was at stake!

In a remote corner of the superb park the Stamboul tire woman, hidden in an arbor, was now crouching, thinking, with a sudden terror, only of the safety of her own head! She feared the rage of the sly Persian officials, she feared the bloody revenge of Mustapha, for her heart told her that the girl had escaped! And also, made wise by years of harem life, she feared the English lady! For the chatter of the visit had reached the whole "andarun!" It had been only an after thought of the mistress of the Shah's harem to recall the strange Frankish girl to her pavilion! The slave reflected on the situation. "No one saw us together! The great English lady surely will not talk! *I have seen*

nothing! That is my story!" Then, with a sudden cunning, she cast the veil and the black shroud-like covering down beside the high park wall, in a distant corner, as if Ilma had thrown them off in haste. And she did not forget to tread the turf around deeply with many a footprint! "Now I am safe!" she cried, in sudden fright, and then hastened away to deeper recesses of the great park! "Others will find these tokens and not I." The sly woman wandered unceasing in the shrubbery. It was not long before she saw many hurrying forms gliding around! Loud calls from the searchers began to resound in copse and thicket, and it was a full half hour later that she was finally confronted by a Persian searcher. "I have not found her yet! Has she not returned to the pavilion?"

There was no suspicion as yet of the escape of the poor jaded traveler! "She is desired at once!" said the messenger, as he threaded the splendid shades of the great gardens! For all knew that the strange arrival could not speak the languages of her guardians! No one had ever escaped from the gloomy enclosure! The guards were all still at their posts! In the confused throng of menials swarming in the gardens at last, there was not one who dared to dream of an escape from the Shah's guarded stronghold of lazy dalliance! But the Mother of the Maids had suddenly sent even her aga to call the beautiful Frankish slave before her! She must be found, and at last one of the seekers stumbled upon the discarded yashmak and veils, the cast-off badges of Ilma Falka's slavery, and then with fear and trembling they sought the officers of the guard, who were responsible for the safety of the veiled odalisques! The outcry was raised, far and near, and guards dashed along, sabre in hand! Mary Derwent was, however, quietly gazing on the throng of Persian beauties gathered in the court of the marble walled "andarun" and watching the women slaves dancing in groups, or with insidious posture, enacting the realistic love poems of the Turanian bards! The

spirited Englishwoman gazed at the score of favorites lolling upon divans or clustered in curiosity about the ambassadorial party of Englishwomen. Fresh from perfumed baths, bearing clusters of the richest flowers, a few of the young women still wore the jewels which in time always pass on to other hands, when the imperial passion has cooled! There were two or three light haired Georgians, but the languishing, dark eyed, heavy limbed beauties predominated.

Some were in the flower of youth, and none had passed beyond the full flower of young womanhood! Their startling raiment was absolutely shocking in the garish sunlight of the golden noon, as they stood under the Moorish arcades, ceiled with angular masses of mirrors set in stucco. The English women exchanged glances, for nautch girl and bayadere were eclipsed by the abandon of the costumes. Ripe, glowing bosoms shown through the single body garment of thin tinselled silk gauze. An enormously spread skirt of flowered brocade rose over stiffened under skirts, rivalling a Viennese prima ballerina's most daring costume! The skirts reached to within eight inches of the knees, and were loosely hung from the hips, the dazzling nakedness of their rounded white limbs terminating at the white stockings reaching up to the knee! Persian slippers embroidered in gold were made of velvet, colored to match the coquettish velvet brodered jacket, heavy with bullion.

"What guys!" murmured Mary Derwent, as she gazed on the painted and powdered faces, whose eyebrows were lengthened to meet over the nose. The eye lashes blackened with kohl, and a blue black band of paint on the forehead, curved down over the eyes, completed the disfigurement of the lovely faces, framed in long straight hair, cut level with the mouth and loosely plaited in little strings, hanging down behind. Each expressionless face was capped by a gold and velvet skull cap, with jewelled side aigrette and a square band of silk crepe, fastened under the chin with jewelled

pins! Their nails and palms were dyed a hideous yellow red with henna!

These childlike, expressionless, doll automatons laughed in a silly way over their sweetmeats, sipped the sherbets and shyly exchanged wondering comments on the shamelessly unveiled faces of the five English women! It was simply a battle of the standards of loveliness! The East against the West! It was nearly an hour after the Magyar girl had tremblingly passed the fatal threshold when a frightened slave approached and, with low salaams, murmured a message to the Mother of the Maids. Mary Derwent, quick-witted and apprehensive, saw the look of wild rage and horror which made the old functionary's face that of a baffled fury! Her nervous, slender hand clasped Lady Caroline's trembling palm, as she whispered, "Thank God! Sir Henry is now in the palace court!" and, with a gentle decision, the young dissembler led the official party quickly out into the great area, where a throng of guards, functionaries and bizarre palace attendants crowded around the dragoman of the English Embassy!

Mary Derwent's heart rose up in true British pride as she saw Sir Henry Arden, cool and self-possessed, his gray tweeds and fresh linen shining bravely out, as he fixed his monocle and haughtily gazed at a brace of excited Pashas! The Persians were jabbering in a wild rage to the cool dragoman. "*They have missed her, at last,*" thought the rejoicing author of all this tumult, and she joyed in her own brave secret, a great, priceless secret, all her own, as Sir Henry quietly whispered, "Don't mind all this hubbub. Mrs. Arden will keep them here talking for an hour, and give our friends time to get the girl back to town and safe in hiding! It's a good fifteen miles to Teheran, and they're slow about sending their parties out! She's all right, though, for, I saw them get away a good hour or more ago!"

With grave stateliness, the whole foreign party en-

tered the state reception room of the great palace. There was a cloud of attendants bringing refreshments, and Mrs. Arden cheerfully noted the curly head and bright face of her husband, seated among his escort, below the palace windows, where the English guard clustered around the carriages! Sir Henry stole up to the window where Mrs. Derwent was exchanging signals with Major Horace! "Stole away, little woman!" gaily said the Minister. "Simply be cheerfully unconcerned! The dragoman has my orders to jabber away an hour or so with them! These fellows dare not question me directly! I think you deserve a medal and promotion," he smilingly said. "I hope the Russian soldiers are now between the party and these fiends!" murmured Mary Derwent, as a platoon of Persian swordsmen clattered down the road! "Bless you!" laughed Sir Henry, "there are fifty stout friends in varied disguises around her now, and the whole road is blocked up with wagons, caravans and pleasure parties! The soldiers will take it easy when once out of sight of their officers! The girl is safe enough in Teheran even now, but how to get her away is the problem! They will seal up every entrance to the city and set all their matchless spies at work! The Persians are the craftiest liars in the whole world!" The visiting party was conducted over the superb marble palace for an hour, little realizing that every one was being scanned by a dozen watchful spies! Even the soldiers, and the carriages, the women servants were now the objects of a greatly enhanced attention! And yet the Persian lion feared the British lion mightily! Mary Derwent shuddered as she walked with calm face among the frightened attendants! At last an inspiration came to calm her heart! "The woman who found me was probably the one who would be responsible for her loss! And she dares not tell! For she has a head to lose! Poor Ilma Falka! To owe her one chance of safety to a harem slave's guilty fear of punishment! They dare not charge me with

the trick!" And so she thanked God with a happy heart!

It was indeed true! After an hour the excited Pashas blandly escorted the great English Minister and his party to their carriages! When Sir Henry Arden placed Mary Derwent in her carriage, he gravely whispered, "We must never even breathe the girl's name! For while we are in Persia we will be always watched night and day, now! That girl's life depends on our absolute silence! By heaven! you are an angel, and Solykoff and Denton are gallant fellows! They whipped her away like a flash!"

There was not a word exchanged, as the anxious women eyed each other, on the long avenue stretching out miles to where Rustem, in blue tiles, was pictured slaying his enemies over the great Shimran gate!

As the Minister's carriage rolled under the great city's portal, Horace Derwent leaned over the side of the carriage and whispered to his wife, "All right, Dolly!" Then Mary Derwent burst into happy tears, as they dashed along in the growing dusk, for Kassim, riding back to the Shimran Palace with an urgent official message, had made a significant gesture, which told Horace Derwent that a woman's wit had won the day! The Pearl of a Thousand Purses was safe in hiding! And Mustapha, the renegade! He was writhing under the lashing scorn of the Turkish Ambassador and the Minister of the Household!

The moment came when Janos Kinsky knew at last that he was in greater peril than the hunted girl, who had fled away from misery and dishonor! The two Moslem dignitaries came back into the room where Mustapha, the renegade, paced the floor like a caged tiger! The eyes of the Persian Minister of the Household burned in a ferocious glare as he contemptuously gazed at the parvenu Pasha!

It was the Turkish Ambassador who strode up to him, and roughly seizing him by the arm, cried out, "Your head answers for this girl's recapture! I will

send for the guide Kassim and the two women slaves! You have your own followers! Once across the Shah's threshold, the slave becomes his property forever! At Bayazid, the moment she passed the Persian line, she was no longer yours to sell! By the beard of the Prophet, you shall never leave Persia till you find her! If you do not you shall be scourged and set at work in chains at the turquoise mines!"

In vain Mustapha pleaded his innocence! "You are a liar and the son of a dog!" cried the Ambassador. "I know your past! The base part you played in Egypt! Your low cunning! Frankish dog, you were born, and Frankish dog you will die!" Then a deep growl echoed from the angered Minister's bosom. "When the Lord of Lords returns she will be required at my hands! There are two moons yet before his coming! When I am called into the presence, your head shall be my answer! And your slave Kassim shall lay it at the feet of the Sun of Suns, whom you have robbed!" Turning to the Ambassador, the irate Persian cried, "I will send an officer to bring you the two women! You have the courier in your hands. Question them! Put them to the torture!" And he swept away, leaving Mustapha cowering before the Turkish official, whose passport alone could open the gates of Persia!

Mustapha threw himself at the official's feet! "Hear me, I beg and pray you, for your own sake! Let but the order be given that no passports shall be given for any foreign woman to leave Teheran and cross the frontiers without personal examination! Give me a band of the Persian Cossacks! I will pursue! I will find her! There is some dark mystery here!"

The Minister turned away! Then Kinsky handed the angered man his own sabre, as he knelt at his feet! "Strike off my head now if I speak not the truth! The baby-faced devil has found some secret friends! Let me go forth and find her! Let my head be the forfeit!" Mustapha dreamed of a wild night ride to the coast! "I can bribe Kassim!" he thought. "Once

out of Teheran, I may escape from these Persian dogs! Money will buy Kassim! He will aid me to escape them! I can make him rich forever!"

The Minister was touched by Mustapha's bravery of desperation! "Fool! put up your sword! It is the girl only I want! She must be found! At dawn I will send a dozen of my own men with you! You may search from Serakhs to Bushire, from Kerman to Bayazid! But my men shall lead the search, and the Persian guard shall have orders to strike your head off, and bring it slung in a sack at a saddlebow if you try to fly! Now, your blood be on your own head! Go!"

Mustapha, with bowed head, crept away to his splendid prison room. I am lost, unless I find her!" he dejectedly groaned. "Cursed be the blood of Falka!" And again the scars upon his back burned with their olden fire! "She shall meet worse than a thousand deaths! I will hound her down! And when she is a cast-off shell she shall die under the lash! I will buy the slave when she is withered! My horse's hoofs shall tread down her corpse in the mire!" And he tossed upon a bed of nettles the livelong night!

There were three men seated in the most secret room of the Russian Legation that night, when the Turk dismissed the cringing Mustapha!

The Russian Minister and Sir Henry Arden waited gravely for Soltykoff's recital! The gallant Russian was alone! "Is there any clamor over the escape?" eagerly cried the victorious soldier. "Ah! you little know the deadly Persians!" said the Englishman. "Not a word will escape them, not a gloomy brow will meet any of us! But, myriad spies will night and day watch every European in Teheran! The officials of the smaller cities, the post kahns, the frontiers and the seaports will be all on the watch for every woman who travels under passport! Detention, searching examination and a cruel vengeance will await any poor fugitive! I have ordered the most absolute official si-

lence here, even in my family! Countess Falka's life hangs now only on our prudence!" "I have enjoined the same," said the Russian, "and have absolutely forbidden Soltykoff to dare to signal a word to the friends without, by telegraph! We must not ruin all by any rashness now!" "Her life hangs on a thread, without this added danger," sadly answered Soltykoff! "But Randall and Denton will not leave her for an instant! They alone know her hiding place. Not even those splendid women, the American missionaries, know who she is, or whence she came. And, alas, she is so worn and changed, her own mother could not recognize her!" Soltykoff's anguish excited even his cool official listeners. "Tell us of the rescue!" said the hearty English nobleman. "Kassim is a wonderful fellow!" cried the Colonel. "I did not know his many arts until, as Denton and myself watched outside, the two women unconcernedly approached the guards! I saw by his quick signal that the woman we waited for was at last going through the dreadful ordeal! In another instant, a dozen beggars seeking alms dashed into the gateway, and confusedly surrounded the two supposed Englishwomen, clamoring loudly! And the merchants of small wares also crowded eagerly around the carriage, pushing and jostling each other! The guard officers had never left their cross-legged Nirvana, and a fierce old sergeant sullenly beat away the rabble! It was in the first Legation carriage that Ilma now sat, with the maid facing her, as Major Derwent sharply ordered the driver to pass on, and allow her ladyship's own carriage to draw up! With an artful talent, he then grouped his escort around the second vehicle, waiting ceremoniously for the supposed coming of the Ambassadress! No one saw the first carriage trundle away. But, before Paul Denton had convulsively grasped my arm, the first carriage had disappeared in safety around the bend and I could see Kassim, in his green turban, quickly trotting along down the road, mounted on a smart mule! Our

own droschky had moved leisurely along, and so, with beating hearts, we cautiously waited till the wall of the Kasr-i-Kajah was left behind us! Then, like the wind, our willing driver raced along, until, in a lonely shadowed place far beyond the wine house, where our own armed followers were concealed, I saw the British Legation carriage halted at last. The attendants were apparently busied with the harness! In twos and threes, Petrovitch's men were now leisurely riding out of the wine house yard, and I then knew that he had seen Kassim's signal to follow and protect our rear. Neither of us dared to speak as our covered droschky halted! It was Paul Denton who thrust the fainting girl into our own carriage, and I was amazed when Kassim sprang in after her! I could not tell you what happened, for Ilma Falka's arms were clasped around Paul Denton and her broken sobbing was the only sound I heard! Kassim hastily tore off the cloak, veil and bonnet from the girl's head. The man who held his mule quickly passed these articles back to the English maid, and as we rolled along with our curtains down, I saw the English servant deliberately envelop herself in the cast-off garments of her new mistress! Then the Legation carriage smartly trotted back around the hill to rejoin Sir Henry's official party! There was no dangerous stranger in sight as Kassim deftly enveloped Ilma in a huge yashmak and then twisted two double veils around her head! 'Be ready now with your arms,' he whispered, as he pulled aside the curtain for a moment and spoke to the disguised Russian driver. The wiry horses made the light carriage bound along, and I could see through the rear curtain glass that Petrovitch's adroitly scattered troopers, now closed up in a solid mass, were smartly pricking along behind us.

"'There is a half-way house, where fresh horses await us!' Kassim anxiously said. 'Once inside the Shimran gate, then we are safe!' In his Mollah dress, myself in Persian garb, with Denton in Parsee ser-

vant's guise, and the muffled woman, who was the type of every Moslem woman who goes abroad, we were only the usual pleasure party of well-to-do denizens of Teheran! When we stopped at the half-way house, while the horses were being changed, Kassim clambered up to the roof of the wine house. He came gliding down as swiftly as the serpent! A horse's galloping hoofs ceased their clatter as Alan Randall drew up beside us! 'Soldiers are in pursuit!' cried the doctor! 'Give your horse to the man who came out with our beasts!' cried Kassim. 'Get up on the box! We may have to fight our way yet! I can see the Persian guards, but, they are miles behind, now!'

"And, as we raced along, the fresh horses sprang forward as if they knew that a human life was theirs to save! 'There are no horses in Persia like our picked team, the very best of the Foreign Ambassadors Russian trotters!' said Kassim! While Randall, turning his head, cheered us on with the news that nothing was now within sight, the great battlemented mud walls of Teheran, our haven, loomed up, nearer and nearer! Ilma was whispering in low tones to Paul Denton as we sat with our arms ready to repel any attack! 'Thank God! There is no telegraph to the Kasr-i-Kajar!' cried Randall! 'If no fleet horseman overtake us then we are safe!'

"But, thank God! there was not even an eyelid lifted in suspicion as we rolled in under the great mosaic of Rustem, mixed up in a great throng of outgoing and incoming travelers! The scowling Persian guards there leaned lazily on their repeating rifles, vainly seeking for the passing giaour to curse and spit after!

"Driving rapidly through the side streets, Kassim now, prudently, leaped out at a corner, where his own horse awaited him, and made his way back with his report! I had only satisfied myself that Ilma Falka was really alive when Randall and Denton half led, half dragged her through the little private door of the Missionary Hospital enclosure! It was only half an

hour until Kassim returned to meet me at the café on the Boulevard, whence another droschky brought me back here! Just before I came here, in the safe shadows of the evening, he returned to tell me the report of his own spies at the Rustem arch of the Shimran Gate! A platoon of soldiers had dashed up not half an hour later we passed, and every veiled women entering after their coming was interrogated and forced to answer in Persian! For no one dares, even in anger, to raise a woman's veil! The sacredness of Islam's badge!"

"Ah! It was a narrow escape! The Countess Ilma's ignorance of the Persian language would have betrayed her!" said the Englishman! "From this moment, every woman passing in or out of Teheran will be most strictly examined, and, what is far worse, they will telegraph to every outlet of the Teheran Valley! A thousand fanatics will be searching soon for this lost Pearl of the Harem! Now there is nothing before us but to guard an absolute silence! Not one human being must know of the existence of this poor hunted girl! Even Kassim, the faithful guide, does not know of her hiding place!" Soltykoff had finished his story of the first act!

The Minister answered: "It is well! Not one of our party must move around Teheran for a few days! This fellow Mustapha will be the head of the grim hunting pack! As he knows you and Randall, you must both lie perdu!"

"I have thought of that!" said the Colonel! "Randall will keep Paul Denton secluded within his own rooms at the Medical College! There are only Christian Armenians serving there! He will have personal medical charge of the girl, who is worn and wasted! She could hardly totter into the gate! One of his evangelical brethren will daily bring me their letters! And he can take my responses back! Kassim will closely watch his renegade master! From the Turkish Ambassador's questions it seems he knows the Per-

sians are officially aware of the evasion! Kassim, too, will be kept under secret watch, and Petrovitch must go down after nightfall and meet him at the café! Then we are done for the night!" said the English Minister to his colleague! "You and I must now concert some means to smuggle this poor child out of this dangerous land! The winter snows will soon be falling! She must get away as soon as she can travel! The Caspian is the nearest outlet!"

"Leave that to me! I have a plan to submit to you both!" cried Soltykoff, as the party broke up. "But, Sir Henry, do not fail to tell your gallant countrywoman that whether the Magyar Countess lives or not, she shall know herself yet what a Russian's gratitude means!"

"Poor darling child!" mused Serge Soltykoff! "To have to lie to her! She must not know of Arpad's death! She has a weary road before her yet! What dangers to face! Once she is safely on the waters of the Caspian, by heavens! I'll hunt every defile in Persia till I track that mad wolf, Mustapha, to bay at last! Then! by God!" The soldier's face relaxed as he thought again of Ilma Falka, brotherless, fatherless, perhaps now motherless! He had told her the first fable that entered his mind. "Arpad was hunting for the lost one in far away Syria, and it would be long weeks before they dared to communicate with him!"

The Russian Minister returned alone! "Now, Serge! what can I do?" he said.

"There is but one thing, Your Excellency! That is to telegraph to Baku to have the 'Olga' await your orders at the mouth of the Jarian River! For Denton, Randall, Petrovitch and I will take this girl out by Asterabad! Then, I wish a perfectly reliable courier!"

"I send the Legation Bag on to Balfrush to-morrow at dawn, Serge, under the escort of a sergeant and five Cossacks!"

"Good! I will then write to the Governor of Baku, and he will send on the dispatches of her rescue over

our own Christian territory to Vienna; Major Fraser Denton alone must know of this good news! For joy can kill as well as sudden sorrows!"

"Solykoff! The courier is yours to dispose of!" said the troubled Minister. "But you will never get that girl out of the country as you propose! Every wandering Persian will be a spy upon you!"

"Ah! Wait and see!" said Serge. "We younger men have conned over every point, and don't forget my own perfect knowledge of every mile of these roads, and of the Persian character! Randall's dozen years of experience, too, have made him half a Moslem in cunning!"

"You may be right! I will do as you decide! Count on me!" said the Muscovite! "They would secretly assassinate every one in the rescuing party if we claimed her openly! The Moslem mob, once raised, it might be another Cabul massacre!" And so, the game old diplomat left Solykoff to his letters!

In the vast enclosures of the darkened American Missionary Hospital grounds, hard by the splendid Mission Buildings, there was but one room where the glow of the night lamp cast its warm tide upon the doubled curtains! Late into the night, while Solykoff still toiled at his secret letters of good tidings, a wondering Armenian nurse looked at Doctor Randall in close scrutiny, seated by the curtained bed where Ilma Falka now lay! Kneeling there at the bedside, Paul Denton, in an ecstasy of sorrow, gazed upon the wasted face of the woman he loved! Randall held the slender wrist as his eye followed the watch, while Denton marked the other slender, helpless hand with its palms and fingers stained with the barbarous henna! The girl's beautiful long hair swept down the pillow with its native gold darkly muddled with the harem dyes! The brutal attendants had not dared to mar her pale cheeks with the painted badges of oriental slavery! For even the Mother of the Maids had eyed the Frankish sufferer askance! It was only her pitiful broken

down listlessness which had induced them to allow the Magyar girl to wander freely in the rose gardens! For such a worn wraith was surely no vision of loveliness to tempt the leaden-eyed Shah! Nasr-ed-Din's band of bedizened nymphs were simply robust, overfed, brainless automatons! Randall's face was grave as he whispered: "I must go and prepare some medicines! Remember! Not for one single moment do you lose her from sight!"

The grave young missionary was lost in thought as he passed out to the dispensary! No one saw the watcher, seated alone by the scarcely breathing girl, raise the feeble little hand to his burning lips! His kisses rained down upon the feverish palm, and bending over her his ear could only catch the faintest murmurs! It was to a beloved mother she spoke in her dreams, and then she stirred her tired arms to whisper: "Where is Arpad! Why does he not come!" And sweetest of all those whispered words: "Paul is coming! Paul and Soltykoff! They will save me!" And when Randall returned her lover's hands gently raised the poor girl's head! Paul Denton dared not question the physician till he felt that he could safely speak! There was an infinite tenderness in his voice when, in the coming gray of the morning, Randall led his anxious fellow watcher aside! "We may have here a new enemy to fight—a deadly enemy, perhaps, Paul! It is a case of utter collapse! Let us pray that it may not turn to brain fever! But she has youth on her side, and her strength may soon return! It all depends now upon her awakening!" The tired nurse nodded away in a corner and Denton regularly called Randall every two hours, as the morning came brightening over the Shimran Hills! The watcher of love could neither weary nor sleep! Seated there, near the regained idol of his heart, he marked the veriest flutter of her flickering breathing! The draped windows shut out the morning sun, and it was long beyond the noon call of the muezzins, when Paul Denton, for the thousandth

time, turning his head to scan the sufferer's pallid face, saw her eyes opened and regarding him in mute wonder! In another moment he was on his knees at her side! "Speak to me, Ilma! You are safe now! It is Paul!" Her fingers closed gently upon his hand. "Why are you so changed! That dress! Ah! You came to save me! Take me away, Paul! Take me away!" Randall had softly stolen in. His quick ear had caught the low murmurs! As the girl's head fell back, he cried: "Quick! Aid me! The cordials!" And, childlike, the patient submitted to the same gentle touch that had soothed her on the Euxine!

There was a happy sigh as her head fell back at last, and Randall gently led Denton from the room! "Take your own rest now! I will be near her every moment! If there is no untoward event, then by evening she will begin to rally! But not a single breath of excitement! Wait, Paul! In another day you may learn from her own lips what you already feel in your heart! You are my patient, too! Remember! We have to make a dash for the Caspian!"

The long day wore away, as Ilma Falka slept under the influence of the soothing anodynes of the young missionary's artful selection! Before midnight Colonel Soltykoff at the Legation knew of the turning of the tide! Each blessed moment of peace seemed to steal into the girl's soul with life-giving vigor! There was not a ripple of excitement in the European colony! Only one secret message boded coming trouble! The sly Kassim had been confronted before the Turkish Ambassador and the haggard-eyed Mustapha, with the two cowering women slaves from Stamboul. But the woman who had discovered Mary Derwent stoutly maintained that never a glimpse of the young fugitive had greeted her eyes since the Pearl of the Harem walked alone down the flowery paths! "Highness!" wailed the woman. "I was no guardian or watch! I was only bidden to wait upon her! Blame the others!"

And the aged crone, too, bewailed her sad *fate* with

wringing of the hands! "We were given orders to minister to her wants in the Pavilion, Mighty Pashas! It was not for us to say if the woman should go or come!" There was truth in their simple words! And Kassim! the sly Kassim, bent his head! "I was but your mute messenger! I was conducted by the guards to where I could see the maiden and bring you the words given to me from these women! To go and to come! I know nothing whatever! These harem people may have hidden the woman away! Or else made away with her! Perhaps she has cast herself in some deep well or tank! Who knows the ways of women slaves? How should a poor roadsman know? Do with me as you will! I never was bidden to watch over the woman after she went within the gates of the Kasr-i-Kajar! The guards were there!"

Mustapha now turned upon the haughty Turk in defence of his servant! "When I was made a poor puppet at Bayazid, neither my followers nor myself could lift a finger! Is it not the truth? They speak aright! Some one has hidden her away up there!" And, emboldened, he whispered to the covetous Ambassador: "The thousand purses! Neither you nor I will ever see a single golden crown of them! Think you not that they have betrayed us both?" The Turk's beard curled in rage! "It may be so! It may be so, Mustapha! There shall be search! My parties and theirs! I will claim the money for the slave myself at the hands of Nasr-ed-Din! A Moslem must keep faith with a Moslem! They tell me they have already scoured the country for fifty miles! And there is no news! Then, if they lie not, she is still hidden there, or else here in Teheran! I will have justice!"

"High Excellency!" cried Mustapha. "There are seventeen palaces and 'andaruns' of the Master of the Faithful in the Shimran Mountains! Do you have search made all over these! And I will scour the city with your trusty men!" And this plan pleased Kassim! But the dragoman had already told the Moslem Am-

bassador that no passport for a woman would be issued to leave Persia until the return of the great Shah to the glittering capital! "The Persian officers will personally examine every foreign woman who seeks to leave the frontiers!"

"Ah!" growled Soltykoff, as he dismissed Kassim. "Then there is no thoroughfare! Either we must wait out the long winter here or some last desperate chance may be ours to try! Kassim!" he said, as the guide left! "You must go out with Mustapha! I would know daily of his path! There is a fortune waiting for you at Baku when you at last bring me face to face with him as I would be! But after that you are ours forever! You must not leave the Russian lines again! The Turks would impale you alive!"

"He shall not escape you! It is a renegade dog!" said the stern-eyed Kurd! "My life is yours! Kassim never forgets!"

There was an anxious conference that evening in the splendid halls of the Negaristan! The Minister of the Household had been hastily summoned before the startled Queen Mother, who was supported by her three haughty sons! The agitated harem official quaked in fear as he threaded the splendid maze of picture galleries, mirrored saloons, marble halls, arcades of fretted Persian stucco, and passed out by the vast colonnades, through the dreamy gardens, to the now trebly-guarded royal "andarun" within the walls of the Teheran citadel. The pellucid tanks of rare porcelain, with their plashing cascades, wooed him not to repose of soul! He saw not the shimmer of the moonlight, nor heard the bulbul's plaintive song! The splendor gleamed there on mosque and kiosk and the splintered rays lined up in silver the pencilled minarets! Music floating from hidden bowers soothed not his soul, for he only gazed timorously at the darkened windows of the "Strangler's Room," where three Grand Viziers had once died under the knotted cord! Seated on a dais, with her robes one glitter of great diamonds,

her three stalwart sons gleaming out in kingly trappings, beside her, the Queen Mother coldly listened to the frightened Minister's story of the loss of the Pearl of the Harem! There was an ominous pause! The princes whispered with their august mother! "You know the Shah's displeasure! Our Ambassador telegraphed this woman to be a world wonder!" Slowly the woman spoke out then, with unpitying eyes! "Had you kept the slave here, within the walls, she would not have escaped! You have four weeks to find her! *You know the price of failure!*" And the humbled man fled away to seek Mustapha! "It is his head or mine now! We must find the girl!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOCTOR'S HEGIRA!—BETRAYED!—A MOSLEM FANATIC!

Two days later there was a secret council of war in the Russian Legation at Teheran! The Minister had assembled all those upon whom the guarding of Ilma Falka's life now depended! For the snows were already beginning to sift down upon the Shimran, and the wild passes leading to the Caspian would soon be blocked for the winter. The English Minister, too, lent his grave counsels, while Soltykoff, Paul Denton, Alan Randall and Petrovitch awaited the deciding voice of the protecting diplomatists! Sir Henry Arden broke the silence, addressing his colleagues.

"If there is any safe way to spirit this poor girl out of Persia, we should act at once! My secret service agents tell me that the town is swarming now with governmental spies! The fanatic Mollahs have passed the word of alarm in their secret assemblies! Every unknown woman leaving or entering Teheran is deliberately questioned! Remember that our sly ser-

vants, too, are all spies! What do you learn? I fear a coming discovery and a wild riot! Of course we would not give her up! But are we strong enough to save ourselves? You know Moslem fanaticism as to the sanctity of the harem!

"Kassim reports that Mustapha has been busied all night in conference with the Turkish Ambassador and the Minister of the Household! Parties of Persian Cossacks are even now sweeping over the valley and every port and pass is carefully watched! The only route open to us is the Caspian! For this wearied girl would die if we tried to smuggle her over to India! To try to return by Bayazid, Bagdad or the Gulf at Bushire, would be simply madness! And we would be deprived of the aid of the Anglo-Indian Telegraph! They will watch that now! It is not a case of choice! We must act at once and take the least risks, on the shortest route! I am willing to place my whole force at Colonel Soltykoff's disposal! The first questions are: Is she safe in her hiding place now? Can she bear the fatigues of travel?"

All eyes were turned to Doctor Randall, who slowly replied: "There is not a single Parsee or Moslem allowed to enter the hospital grounds! Countess Falka is hidden in our private ward for our own missionary sick! So treachery seems impossible! I rely also on your promise to defend the mission enclosure with your joint escorts!" The Ministers bowed their assent! "I have further taken my own precautions! I have destroyed every article the poor girl brought from her hideous place of captivity! Her beautiful hair has been closely cropped! And to eradicate the henna, kohl and daubing of these women afrites, I have stained her head, arms and feet with a native walnut brown! The devoted woman who nurses her is an Armenian who saw her whole family butchered by these beasts! But, as a further precaution, even she shall not leave the private ward and its walled garden till the Austrian is far over the border!"

The two Ministers, in a breath, asked: "Can she stand the rough travel?"

"Ah!" answered Randall. "There is the gravest question! She is rapidly gaining in bodily strength, but the effects of the long continued drugging linger! Her mind is still confused! Her long confinement and the distorted glimpses of her strange path have gravely unsettled her memory! I am controlling her excitement with medicines, and I fear nothing now but the effect of some sudden shock! She must not know of her mother's condition or of her brother's death! But in a few days I think that she might be made ready for the road! Could you reach the border in two weeks, Colonel?"

Soltykoff and Petrovitch exchanged glances! And then the Russian noble spoke with decision. "If she is able to support even ordinary fatigue I can reach the point where the steamer should be in ten days!"

"Then I will engage to have her ready for you in a week!" said the doctor. "There is but one way for her to travel! Every woman is scanned and scrutinized. She must go out in man's attire!"

"Can you thoroughly disguise her?" anxiously said Sir Henry Arden! "A beautiful young woman!"

"Ah! There's little beauty left to tempt Shah or Pasha now!" said the doctor. "But as to her disguise, Soltykoff and I know every costume and habit of the orient, learned in our years of wandering here! And as we stake our lives on it, you may trust us!"

"Then we are all of one mind!" said the Briton. "We will leave the whole details to you, and support you in every way in our power!"

The Russian Minister said: "This must be our last general meeting! The Legations are all secretly watched! I will send a couple of my couriers out now over the road proposed, and also have a couple of others started backward hither at the same time! Soltykoff has Petrovitch's reliable troops! I will get passports for the whole under pretense of the annual re-

lieving of my Legation Guard! We can also assemble some trusty disguised followers in motley garb, and these four men must not fail in this dash! I have induced the other Foreign Ministers to send their ladies on visits to the various 'andaruns' here within the walls! The visit to the Shimran will seem to have been only one of a European woman's curiosity! And once in sight of the Caspian the 'Olga' will land her armed crew to promptly support Colonel Soltykoff. I know," he faintly smiled, "that no subordinate Persian will dare to come into armed collision with the Czar's officials guarded by our own troops!"

"Count on me for anything I can do!" said the hearty Englishman. "It is better that I know nothing more as to details, for my Legation ladies are all burning to know what I dare not tell them! What man can resist a clever woman's ways? I will await your own personal visit, and strongly advise no outgoings after this of these two principals! All depends now on you two! You tell me that this renegade, Mustapha, has familiarized himself with the faces of Colonel Soltykoff and Doctor Randall! There is the one danger! These fellows are devils in cunning! And the fierce Persian horde will die in this holy cause if alarmed!"

"No one shall know of our route or of our time of departure! We will steal out of the city in small parties, and Randall and I will alone disguise the girl, and after that no Moslem shall have a chance to speak to her!" This was Soltykoff's last promise! "It is the only way we can protect her. For detention would ruin us!"

Two weeks later the palace menials of Teheran were all busied hastily preparing for a magnificent fête of welcome! For the Lord of Lords and King of Kings was now hastening back from Shiraz! The city of Teheran was ready to blaze out in gaudy illuminations of rejoicing when the signal guns on the Artillery Square should announce that Nasr-ed-Din was again seated upon the golden pavilion of the Peacock Throne! The

pious Mollahs imploring Allah and hoarsely chanting in the mosques gave thanks for the return of the Master of the Faithful! The motley guards were being mustered for review, and the huge throng of courtiers now eyed every movement of the Royal Princes! The Queen Mother awaited her polygamous son and ruler in the splendid "andarun" of the citadel! Already the lissom-limbed houris of the harem were clustered waiting in their rosy bowers, and the famous subterranean baths were tenanted by the stars of the odalisques! Tulips and irises decorated the great apartments, and attar of roses was scenting the air in the rooms where the gazelle-eyed slaves awaited the royal wooer! The great open air theater was all ready for the barbaric passion plays of the Imperial mummeters, and in far Sultanetabad and the Kasr-i-Kajar the busy lackeys were clustered like flies! All Teheran thrilled in the general joy!

In the great Talar, the pillared porch of white marble with its lion-guarded steps, upbore on its dazzling platform the far-famed throne! The generals and courtiers thronged the vast halls of the palaces where the Treasure Room, the Porcelain Rooms, the Armory, the Picture Gallery, the Council Chamber and the Room of Offerings exhibited all the hoarded treasures of the Kajar dynasty! Pasha and aga, guard and equerry thronged the illuminated halls! Armed attendants were stationed before each low domed recess, where in the long parallelograms the crystal doors shut off the heaped up glittering spoil of Örmuz and the Ind! For a stern-faced man, a mighty hunter, an imperious despot, a cold-eyed, sensual autocrat was now hastening back to the lazy delights of the vast pavilion of blue tiles, lit up with its swinging silver lamps! The grotto of a Thousand Delights was waiting where the glowing naiads were sporting on the marble slide which led their tempting nakedness into the perfumed crystal waters!

The Queen Mother, in a last anxious consultation

with the royal princes, was troubled at heart as they sat waiting the Shah's coming in the bowers of the Gulistan! Her three sons were gloomy and depressed! The sudden homecoming of the great Shah had defeated their cherished hopes of first recovering the lost Pearl of the Harem—the woman whose vaunted beauty was the presumed cause of the Shah's sudden arrival! The "Prince Felicitious," the shadow of the king, his brother; the Lieutenant of the Kingdom, and the Heir Apparent, all Sultans in title, secretly trembled at the wrath to come! "Allah grant, that our Lord and Master go at once to his own 'andarun' of the Negaristan, and not out to Kasr-i-Kajar!" grumbled the eldest Sultan, who already had felt a father's wrath. "For heads will fall," he said, "if he be angered!" And so they lingered there in fear, not in love, for the appearance of the leaden-eyed debauchee! The Lord of the Lion and the Sun was within two days' march of Teheran, when Kassim had stealthily dodged into the Russian Legation!

Solytkoff was busied with the mysterious preparations for the flitting! He sprang to his feet as the faithful Kurd announced his own departure for the deserts! "The Shah is even now almost at the gates! Now Mustapha Pasha leaves under orders to-night to search as far as the passes of the Elburz! He is almost frantic with rage and fear, and he has bidden me go with him! The rest of his followers he leaves here! He will have to abandon them! For I know now that he works only to save his head! A troop of the Cossacks of the Persian Guard go with us! I have divined his plans! He would lead the troops into the defiles toward Reshd and Balfrush! Then his own plan is to secretly escape, for he has offered me gold and jewels to have the Kurds here send out to their mountaineers and be ready to guide him out of Persia by the Caspian, whence the first boat will bear him away, or else over into the mountains of Armenia at Astara! He will have false orders sent after him to the troops to

follow on some other fancied clue, while we two men escape alone! But for all this, you must fly at once! For the whole band of Persian officials now fear the Shah's wrath! Now is the time for you to get away in the confusion of the king's return! And I perhaps may see you no more!" mourned Kassim! "I had designed to desert to your own body of followers, to change my guise and to never cross into Moslem lands again! I would serve your Czar in Trans-Caucasia! But, now, Mustapha drags me away with him!"

"That is well, Kassim!" cried Soltykoff, who was still in his Persian garb. "But your best work is to cleave closely to this man! I would myself follow him later to the death! The Governor of Baku will have my orders concerning you! If you do reach Kurdistan or cross the frontier, the news of where he hides shall then make your fortune! I will have the Russian Governor at Baku house you there till I can come! You must escape from Mustapha! Now you will find an order waiting there at Baku for the gold I promised! But if we should meet again, if we are driven by pursuit near you, then steal away at once from Mustapha and come over to us! He has no real power now, and you can ride as a disguised trooper with Petrovitch in the ranks! We have already all our passports for the whole command! I must now leave you! Remember! Your fortune is in your own hands! Watch over him that he does us no secret harm!"

The Kurd's eyes glittered ominously! "I will stab him to the heart or poison his cup before he lifts a single hand against you!" said the secret agent! "I am a Russian for life when I am free! I will faithfully do your bidding!" And the guide departed! He waits every moment now for his departure! But at the door he paused, and, running back, whispered: "He would lead them off the scent to Casveen, and then, in secret, float down the Kizil Uzen River and get away by a fisher boat on the Caspian from some village near Reshd! He fears only for his head!" Kas-

sim bounded away! For he feared the lynx-eyed spies of the angered Mollahs!

Then, Serge Soltykoff sprang into Denton's room to rouse him. "We must be away at daylight, Paul!" he cried. "As soon as the city gates open! Now, without a word to a single human being, betake yourself to the Hospital! I will give Captain Petrovitch my last orders, and take my leave of the English Ambassador! The time has come to act! The troops will await us at the city gate!"

Soltykoff could not go out to the final ordeal without a word of adieu to the brave Englishwoman who had braved an instant death to save Ilma Falka's life! It was eight o'clock when Soltykoff left the English Embassy, and the missionary gardens were shrouded in darkness when the Russian sought out the private ward! Denton awaited him at the door! In an ante-room, Alan Randall watched on guard over the door to the room where Ilma Falka was hidden! As the two men entered Randall raised a warning finger! "She is sleeping! She needs all the strength we can give her! All is ready for a start at four o'clock! We must be out of the Shimran gate before sunrise! Are your troops ready?"

"All is ready, and I have spoken the last word!" said Soltykoff! "Petrovitch answers for all now, and we have already our own couriers spread out along the line from Demavend Pass to Asterabad! Petrovitch has two splendid riding camels, several extra riding animals for us, and all the stores! Are you ready?"

"Perfectly!" said Randall! "We have taken the annual passports to visit and inspect all our outlying missionary stations! One of the missionaries will go! I will know who at midnight! Probably Doctor Edwards, who has never seen Asterabad! The carriage with a cavasse will go with us as far as possible beyond the Shimran Hills! From there we must trust to the Persian camel litter for Countess Ilma!"

There was soon an anxious silence in the pavilion after Soltykoff had asked one last question.

"Does your friend Edwards know of our dangerous charge?"

Randall frankly said: "I left that for him to find out after we are well over the Elburz! Remember! No one knows of her real character here! I dared not tell them! The local colony are justly timid in such treacherous surroundings! Edwards will have to keep our secret, but, he has yet to find it out! He only knows that I go disguised for fear of the resentment of a great Persian Pasha whom I have unluckily offended!" The stars were paling in the early dawn while the party silently roused up and quickly arrayed themselves for the road! Soltykoff and Denton noiselessly directed the loading of the packs, as the little train of animals was mustered before the door of the pavilion! In Ilma Falka's curtained room, the Armenian woman was busied with arranging the maiden's disguise! Not a moment was lost when the missionary carriage drew up at the door! Alan Randall then led out a muffled form, followed by a seeming Persian attendant! The man mounted and the carriage smartly approached the main gate, hidden in its bosky trees! The attendants stood by ready to unbar the heavy doors! "We will pick up Doctor Edwards at the other gate!" said Randall, as the doors swung back! There was a start of surprise as two mounted figures appeared before them! It was just light enough for Soltykoff to distinguish the English wife's bright face, as her husband hastily aided her to dismount! While he gave their horses to his two servants, Mary Derwent sprang into the covered carriage! And Paul Denton, gazing in amazement, heard the sobs of the two young women mingling in a last good-bye! It was but a few moments that the carriage was halted, but it told the whole story of the daring Englishwoman's loving devotion to the one who was to run the gauntlet! "We'll ride back later, when the gardens are opened!" said Horace

Derwent! "Good luck to you, Soltykoff, and God be with you!" The great gates closed upon them with a clang! The pack train was already a half mile away, and without a word, the missionary companion of the journey seated himself in the carriage as it passed before the residence gates! Then on through the heart of the slumbering city the splendid horses sped away, past the closed Legations, on beyond the European quarter, and was soon mingled in the great throng of mules and asses, panier laden, streaming in through the opened Shimran gate! Soltykoff, Randall and Paul Denton sat as watchful as bandits in waiting for the signal, their arms ready, while a drowsy Persian guard officer fumbled over the papers which the cavasse briskly presented! One glance of keen scrutiny within the carriage satisfied the Persian there were no women within! The papers were all in regular order, and the officer gravely pocketed a golden guinea! The driver lashed his horses up and hastened away in the wake of the gray-coated column of Russian troopers which was now easily jogging along in advance. There was nothing to tempt to conversation, and not even stout Petrovitch, nodding over his chargers ahead, gazed at the vehicle as it swept on, in its easy traveling stride! They were on the road! That long road to the sea!

Soltykoff rode a Turkish saddle, and was the beau ideal Persian merchant of prosperous standing, as he gravely guided his stout charger steadily on! The sun rose brightly over the blue hills to the east and the deserted road soon began to be alive with the humbler village travelers! The Russian Colonel dropped behind his party and Captain Petrovitch ranged up beside him!

"So far, so good!" laughed the gallant young cavalryman! "What are your orders?"

"Let us move on steadily till we pass the Kasr-i-Kajar, and the last line of country houses on the Shimran! The guards there will naturally note your col-

umn in passing! Let us gain a few hundred yards in the lead there, but once over the hills, then we must cover every mile that we can for the next three days! Once through the pass of Demavend, I will give you the cue! For you will surely be followed by their spies, and we must try to throw them off the track! Let your men straggle along easily till we pass the harem guards at Kasr-i-Kajar!"

Paul Denton, riding at the side of the carriage, held his breath when the straggling little cavalcade passed the gate from which Ilma Falka had been smuggled out! There was no unusual feature in the slender pack train, the three nodding camels with the litter and camp equipage, and the half dozen nondescript riders! But the frowsy soldiers clustered around the gate to gaze in wonder at the Czar's horsemen whose men were the very counterpart of their own model regiment! Their Christian enemies! Long gray coat, astrakan turban, diagonally slung sabre, with the gleaming rows of cartridges on their breasts, and high cavalry boots, their Berdan rifles and the heavy Smith & Wesson pistols, made them the very double of the picked body guard of Nasr-ed-Din!

"Where go you?" courteously demanded a Persian officer, as Petrovitch drew up his men, and saluted in passing the proudly flaunted royal ensign! The wily young Russian gravely replied: "To the coast! To Balfrush, or to Reshd, from there! We embark for Baku! We may have a steamer at Balfrush, or take a boat to Reshd! This guard has been relieved and goes to Russia!"

"Infidel dogs!" cried the officer, as the troops passed on over the knolls which hid Soltykoff's caravan! "They should be closely followed! Spied upon! Perhaps, they mean us some harm!" But he had learned that they had the proper royal road passports, and he returned to his beads and his narghileh!

When Soltykoff rode up to Denton, after the long walls of the harem prison were left far behind, he

asked in a low voice: "Ilma?" "Sleeping, thank God!" cried the American, whose agitated heart began to beat freely, as they lost the danger signal of that Persian royal ensign from view! "She is in a singular state!" He did not know of Alan Randall's merciful sedatives, secretly administered. For, there were toils and fatigues unknown and many hidden dangers awaiting them in the rocky passes of Demavend, where the early October winds were whirling down the light powdered snow from the lofty parapets!

"We will not halt till we are well over the range!" cried Soltykoff! "Every mile made now is an added guarantee!" And his heart beat high in hope as he turned to see the head of Soltykoff's column following behind within rifle range! There had not been the slightest communication between the straggling caravan and the Russian troopers!

They had now left the railroad ending at Shah Abdieh far behind. The line of country houses, summer Legation cottages and Persian palaces was veiled from sight on the sunset side of the Shimran long before Soltykoff dared to halt his caravan! There was need to rest at last and feed the jaded animals, while Petrovitch, with a soldier's eye to his troop horses, made a midday rest down below them in the road! For they artfully kept within plain sight of the strong-armed party! The mountain road was thronged with crowds of footmen and horsemen! Caravans of laden camels, their heads proudly decked with tinsel and bells, wayfarers on asses, mules and stocky little Persian steeds! From the passing merchant and soldier to the green-turbaned Mollah, every grade of rags and dress of skin and gaudy stuff was visible as the motley mass poured by, seeking to reach Teheran's gates before nightfall! Astrakan turban, peaked Persian cap, white and green Moslem headgear, the red fez and the brown felt peasant conical hats bobbed along the winding stretches of the mountain road! Soltykoff had found a cool spring in the shade of a grove where he

gathered up his followers! Doctor Edwards gazed in astonishment at the singular appearance of the silent traveling companion in the carriage. At nightfall, the comfortable conveyance must be sent back, and the surprised missionary easily divined the uses for the empty camel litters of the party! The responsible head of the party recognized the presence of the Armenian nurse woman in a nondescript disguise! Of the humblest village class, she was no object of interest in a land of a thousand varying costumes, and forty different mingled races and tribes!

But, there was the tall, slender youth, clad in a long Persian shepherd's sheepskin coat, reaching to the heels! Yellow Persian leather boots and a conical lambskin cap drawn down to the ears finished the dress, belted by a shepherd's twisted girdle! A long brown neck scarf of coarse camel's hair cloth was cast aside by the stranger seated on the grass in the midst of the European travelers! The matter of fact missionary was secretly disturbed at heart! He was not cast in a mould of adventure-loving romance! There was a tell-tale courtesy in the treatment of the mysterious youth, and when the rough skin gauntlets were removed for a moment the missionary saw the slender and delicate hands of the Magyar patrician girl!

"He drew Randall aside, as the hasty meal was finished and the carriage animals were put again in harness! Soltykoff was urging his party for an immediate departure, as a throng of the wayfarers were gathering, waiting in turn to water their animals at the spring! "I dislike all mystery, Randall!" testily said the hoodwinked doctor. "You are taking some dangerous risks here! It is easy to see that this young person is a woman! What does it mean?"

"Hush! For God's sake!" the young doctor answered, gripping his arm! "You will see nothing of her after she goes in the camel litter! And in a few days, the whole affair will be explained! It's a matter of life and death! Trust to me!"

The disconcerted missionary grumbled. "Well, I will wait, but this masquerading puts us in bad odor with the authorities!"

They hastened to their places as the leading animals drew out! The carriage was already tenanted by the two disguised women and the caravan smartly pricked along the still practicable carriage road! "I wash my hands of all responsibility!" grumbled Edwards, as he glared at the silent form of the slender youth who had again enveloped himself in the fleecy folds of the brown scarf! The troopers of Petrovitch were straggling at will along the road, their commander with a knot of picked men purposely lingering below till Soltykoff should have gained a convenient advance!

As Soltykoff sprang on his horse Denton and Randall rode up to him for orders! The three men lingered a moment! "Paul! You must not show your tender solicitude for this dear girl!" sharply said the Colonel! "Remember our bond! Absolute silence is the safety of all till we cross the Jarian River! Randall, look well to this! One false motion might betray us! To-night we camp at the foot of the pass, and then we will send back the carriage in the morning! After Ilma enters the camel litter she must only dismount when her tent is pitched! The noonday halts might be dangerous!

"Our intercourse might betray us! I will see that no one approaches us near enough hereafter to note your involuntary courtesies!" They rode smartly on after the carriage!

When they had turned the angle of the road, a lean yellow Moslem sprang out from the shaded thicket behind the spring! His green turban showed him of the Prophet's blood and his eyes gleamed with a ferocious hatred! "Accursed Christian dogs!" he snarled, as he quickly ran across the road to where a lad watched his grazing horse! The last stragglers of Soltykoff's party were just vanishing around the bend! "They go to the Pass of Demavend! They may be

caught before they reach the coast!" Abdallah, the Mollah, clapped his hands and frantically urged on the saddling of his horse! "Blessed be the hour of noon-day prayer!" the fierce fanatic cried! "It must be the lost one! I must ride like the wind!" The lithe young fanatic was a Hadji! In his voyage to Bushire and to far Mecca and Medina, he had watched the giaour dogs gathered around their ladies on the decks, while he sat cross-legged in prayer on the decks below! Hidden apart from the dusty road for his devotions, he had watched this strange party of travelers! The one person in European garb was instantly recognized by him as one of the hated missionaries, but, when the slim young Persian camel boy strode to the carriage the hidden fanatic saw the elastic strides of the graceful youth! A slender hand was uncovered for one fatal moment, and Abdallah had noted Denton's too tender care of the supposed peasant lad! He greatly marvelled as he crouched upon his praying rug, but the last colloquy betrayed the whole scheme of flight! "These be disguised feringhees! And, the slim youth is surely one of the Frankish women!" A mighty burst of joy swelled in his heart, for he had ridden out as far as the Pass of Demavend to search for tidings of the Lost Pearl of the Harem! As he sprang on his horse he shouted in exultation "There are soldiers at Kasr-i-Hijar! They shall pursue these dogs and bring them back! For, they are disguised and speak the accursed tongue of the English! But their priest is one of the New World!" His light robes streamed out as he pressed his light Persian steed to the gallop!

"I can reach Kasr-i-Hijar by nightfall! And the soldiers can overtake them in the Pass of Demavend!"

Away like the wolf on the track of the hunter, the gleaming-eyed fanatic rode, his green turban shining in the afternoon sun! Poised lightly in his saddle, he leaned forward as the fierce swordsmen of Ali thundering down upon the Christian foe! "A hundred purses are mine if it be the Frankish slave! And vengeance

for the breaking into the 'andarun!' It is these beasts of Franks! They would rob the King of Kings!" And the messenger of vengeance spurred on his horse with bleeding rowels!

Ilma Falka had thrown herself down on the piled rugs in the little tent pitched for her and twenty stout hearts watched the little bivouac, pitched in a glen at the farther foot of the Shimran Mountains, when Abdallah, the Hadji Mollah, at last rode breathlessly into the great gate of Kasr-i-Hijar! An excited group quickly listened to his story, as he urged the dispatch of soldiers after the fugitives! "It may not be done so!" said the grave commander of the Palace Guard! "These soldiers of the Russians are hovering near to these Franks! And the Cossacks of the Russian Embassy go to Balfrush to sail homeward to Baku on the Caspian! There is abundant time! For these Franks you would bring back will part company with them, at Demavend!" He clapped his hands and bade the swiftest carriage be made ready! "Let this pious Mollah's horse be well cared for, and his boy who comes on after with his mule! We go to the Ark to see the Minister of the Household! And he will give such orders as pleases our great master! There must not a word be spoken of this! These Franks must be trapped! Let the Russians get once well on their way, and then no one will know! We will arrest the carriage and examine it when it comes back from the end of the road!"

The late traveler on the road made way as two swift outriders galloped ahead of the palace carriage wherein Abdallah told his story of the espionage from his place of prayer! "By the Beard of the Prophet! Hadji Mollah!" said the old officer, "the Minister will make you a rich man for life if this be true!"

The silver moonlight gleamed down on the superbly illuminated palaces within the walls of Teheran as they approached! Negaristan's domes and halls stood lined out in living light, and the fairy gardens of the Gulistan were vocal with the voluptuous music of the

French bands! Springing from the carriage, the officer signed to the fierce Abdallah to hasten! The guards led them at once to the presence of the man who now trembled for his head! Too late the Minister had seen his fatal error in sending Mustapha forth, for the Lord of Lords had now returned, and was even now dallying in the marble "andarun," where the dark-eyed beauties eagerly waited for their Imperial master!

"There may yet be time!" cried the Minister, as he hastily sent for the official in charge of the Telegraph. "Mustapha and the troops are but one day on the road to Casveen. They shall be recalled by telegraph! The troops to wait at Kasr-i-Hijar! Let them ride night and day! There will be fresh horses at the palace for them! Mustapha must be ordered to come here without drawing rein! He can be sent out to the hills in my carriage! He is the only one who knows this woman! They can be easily caught beyond the Pass of Demavend!" The telegraph operator darted away as the Minister's heart beat in a new found happiness! "This will save me!" he mused, "for, the King of Kings will require the woman now at Mustapha's hands! And his head shall answer for her now! I must see the Vali Ahd; he is the Shah's favorite, and he alone, can break his father's storm of wrath!" Bidding the guard officer and the Mollah await his orders in his private apartments, the Minister gave orders for their splendid entertainment! "Abdallah shall lead on the chase with this Mustapha Pasha!" cried the wary Minister, "lest the renegade dog play us false!"

The shouts and songs of rejoicing rang around the great palaces of the Negaristan that night, while Mustapha Pasha was sweeping back from the first station on the Casveen road with a ferocious glee! "Ride! Ride! Kassim!" he cried. "There is fortune, honor, vengeance before us now!" And, Kassim stealthily plotted in his mind as to the time to strike the fatal blow! "Not yet!" he muttered! "For there are others also on the trail! I will go with him and try to out-

wit him! For I may warn them, perhaps! I may save them at the last! He shall live till the time decreed by the Fates!"

While the grim renegade rode back swiftly in the night to take up the chase, and Abdallah, the Mollah dreamed of forfeit Christian heads and of his coming riches, the rescued Hungarian girl slept peacefully in the far off defile under the very shadows of Demavend, breathing the air of freedom! There was no sound save the neighing of a charger from the camp of Petrovitch hard by, where sentinels walked in the night watches, doubling the force of her own volunteer body guard! Paul Denton's lover heart was under the stern restraint of discipline! "Wait! Ilma, darling! Wait till we see the sea!" he had whispered, as he stole in to kiss her hand in the silence of their first night of the hegira!

The three watchful men in the midnight sat around their camp fire with Petrovitch, who had wandered in from his station near by! In low tones they spoke of the road before them and of all its hidden dangers! "I will say nothing of the future march till we are on the Caspian slope!" was Petrovitch's last remark, as he listened gravely to their plans! "But, I will say that I am in favor of making a dash for Balfrush, the very moment we are clear of the mountains! I can reach it in three days! There is always some one of our vessels there! Hurry the girl aboard and then put to sea at once, even in one of the Persian boats! She will be safe there! It's a long march to Asterabad! If we should be followed on that ten days' march, what then?"

"Fight them to the death!" cried Soltykoff, fiercely! "Ah! That would not save Countess Ilma Falka!" said the gallant Russian cavalryman as he picked up his sabre, and then strode away, lost in his anxious forebodings.

The watch fires were burning brightly long before dawn before the tents where Soltykoff waited to rouse

the camp! Long before Ilma Falka's sleep was broken, the carriage was on its way back to Teheran! "If questioned be sure to say that we have gone to Anima-bad, and the south side of the Elburz!" was the Colonel's last injunction! The camp was ready for the road when Ilma Falka stepped out of her little tent! Alan Randall's watchful care had provided the morning meal, deftly arranged by the Armenian woman! "Now for the Pass!" whispered Soltykoff, as Ilma was bestowed in the camel litter! "To-morrow night we sleep at Assur, over the Elburz!"

They were long miles on the road before the sun leaped up beyond the Elburz, and Ilma slept wrapped in her light fur coverings, behind the closed coverings of the basket litter! It was lightly balanced on the other side, and a trusty Russian led the splendid camel! The second animal bore the Armenian woman, while a third rejoiced in freedom, ready to serve at need!

"Now! Petrovitch!" cried Soltykoff, as the two men rode on watch at the rear. "Let us make every mile that we can in these two days! Once beyond Assur we are safe! Not a human being must approach us! Give your troopers all their secret orders! We must repel intrusion by force!"

And they were soon swallowed up in the winding glens leading to the long, lofty ridge which now divided them from the Caspian, where the steamer "Olga" waited even now for the fugitives! At five o'clock in the evening, Soltykoff, rising in his stirrups, caught the first glance of the Caspian slopes through a notch in the mountains! "There is our thoroughfare! There is the way homeward! And there, the blue and white cross waits for us!" Every heart bounded in a mad joy as they hurried on!

Paul Denton spurred up his horse to join in the sight! "It is wonderful, Serge!" he cried. "She seems to gain life and vigor with every onward step! To freshen, every mile!"

Grave Alan Randall joined them. "Not one need-

less word to excite or distract her! We are still in the enemy's country, remember!" Randall did not impart to his companions the vigorous remonstrances of Doctor Edwards, who had already decided not to join the risks of the party beyond Assur! "I have my own fears that you will never get through!" he gloomily said to Randall! "I can make my own way down to Balfrush alone, and go on by sea to Asterabad!" The proposed desertion by the timorous traveler depressed Randall, who had sworn to be faithful to the last! "She shall not go back to slavery! If we are arrested, it is a good time for a man to die! Fighting for an innocent girl!"

In far away Teheran, as the sun lit up the marble walls of the Negaristan with a rosy glow, the Minister of the Household bowed low before a stern, hawk-eyed man of nearly sixty! The hard, lean face was pitiless in the expression of its set lips, shaded with a long, thin, fierce black mustache! The narrow eyes gleamed under contracted, curving eyebrows! Nasr-ed-Din was, even in age, a splendid figure in his single-breasted dark frock and trousers, bearing a broad golden stripe. General's epaulettes and a broad blue sash gave a military tone to the dress, set off by forty immense single diamond buttons! He wore a girdle of diamond clusters, and his thin hand grasped a superbly jeweled scimeter. His tall astrakhan cap sloped outwards, bearing a magnificent diamond aigrette, surmounted with an egret plume! His sleeves were heavy with the French gold-braided loops of Commander-in-Chief! The face had all the sleeping ferocity of the finer Italian mould, and, trained to the chase, his figure was still light and elegant! There was no one but the trembling functionary listening to the curt sentence of death! For the Shah's voice trembled in his passionate rage!

"Bid the renegade dog seek her out! Do all as you have planned! There is no way out for these fugitives! Send one of your best officers on with him, and

the Mollah! They are all to be brought back to Kasr-i-Hijar! If he fails, let his head be the forfeit! And you! If you are found remiss, you shall be a slave to the end of your days! Let them not draw rein! Go now and send them, but—one word! These Russian soldiers are not to be molested, for they journey to the sea with our own permission! The Englishman and the Russian I may not lightly quarrel with! These Franks from the New World are not Russians! Let them be taken! But, not a single shot is to be fired at the Russians! Their ships of war are even now on our Caspian waters! Let them be all gone before these wanderers are captured! Look to it! Give your secret orders to the chief of your soldiers, and not to the renegade! If he try to escape, let him be killed like a dog! And they must ride night and day to find them! Bring me the news of the slave!”

As Mustapha Pasha dashed out of the Shimran gate an hour later in the carriage, he watched the Minister of the Household whispering in Persian to the escort officer! The renegade gazed at Kassim galloping ahead like a messenger of death. He muttered “We: must outwit them! Kassim must lead me to the sea! If I do not find her then—it is a race for life! It is now her life or mine!”

CHAPTER XIV.

KASSIM'S WARNING!—AT BAY IN THE TOWER OF SILENCE!

There was never such a pursuit through the Pass of Demavend as the unceasing march of Mustapha Pasha's fierce-eyed troops! The column of Persian Cossacks pressed on, only giving the animals time to bait and taking only a three hours' rest in the middle of the day! Not a ten or single pound of useless lug-

gage encumbered the pursuers. A dozen spare youths mounted on hardy ponies drove a band of reserve troop horses! The troopers who straggled came in at will at the resting camps while their jaded horses were changed for the fresh animals!

Mustapha was the very figure of a soldier on duty, and his only confidant was the lean Kassim, ever pricking to the front with two chosen troopers! The commander of the escort vouchsafed no word to the astonished keepers of the Chapar Khanats, as the frightened officials brought out grain and food! There was a royal order of "Double Post, on the Shah's Business!" The wondering keepers of the mud-walled post khanats shook their heads ruefully as they watched this grim command pressing on like a band of famished wolves! Then barring the arched doors of the stations, at once stable and servants' dens below, the officials, mounting to the travelers' rooms above, clambered on to the roof of the second story to see the wild riders quickly disappear sweeping along over the bare, gravelly wastes! It was three days after the departure from Kasr-i-Hijar, when beyond the brown patches of wormwood scrub, and dwarf almonds, hidden with little gardens of tulip and iris, the little village of Assur shone out nestling in the bleak hills! The wearied command had marched all the long hours of the chilly night and men and animals were benumbed by the October blasts now sweeping coldly down from the Pass of Demavend behind!

The morning sun had crept out of a bank of low fog to the east, and lit up a wild, gray, stony waste sweeping past jutting sand bluffs and rocky knolls down to the low marshes of the Caspian, a hundred and fifty miles away! The Persian squadron commander rode up to Mustapha Pasha, whose eyes glittered now with a thirsty, unslaked revenge! "They should be here!" he sharply cried! "We have outrun even the jackals, and here, the road divides to Balfrush, and the main road goes on to Puli Sefide, but two days'

march! These Christian dogs can not outride the Persian horse! Your own guide knows this Frankish slave! Let him take two men and cautiously approach the village! They can hold his horse and he can steal quietly in on foot! We will wait here a half hour, and breathe the horses! He can find out if they have turned to the sea, or gone on to Puli Sefide! If they are here, let him then steal back, and we will circle the village, and so, snare the Christian dogs! Remember the Russian troopers must be outwitted! You know our orders!" Mustapha bowed his head. "Shall I not ride forward?" cried the renegade, his hand dropping to his sabre hilt! "You are not to leave my side!" coldly said the Persian! "If we do not find them here, then they have surely gone across to the south of the Elburz! We will rest then at Puli Sefide, and send half our forces after them through the mountains at Dunlatabad! Then we will surely catch them by surprise! But they should have passed here late last night, if they are not even now in the village!"

Drawing his men carefully up behind a point of the hills, screened from the blasts, the Persian soldiers loosened girths, and calmly awaited Kassim's reconnoissance!

The glittering eyed Kurd bowed in silence, as he attentively listened to his orders! "Find out the road the Russian soldiers took, and also these fleeing giaours! If they have turned off to the right, they are ours! If they have gone to the left with the Russians, we may not dare to fight the Czar's soldiers! Your head answers for your faith!"

Kassim galloped away, and Mustapha followed him with anxious eyes! "If I were only able to outwit this keen young officer! I might be left here as sick, and gain the sea at Balfrush!" But, he knew now that the Persian soldier had orders to bring him back, dead or alive! He was a hostage for the girl he had stolen! Kassim threw up his hand in caution as he neared the

village, and left his own steed in a sheltered hollow! The two troopers watched him as he stole along into the muddy streets, where a few early peasants crawled around their flat roofed hovels! And then he turned into the one principal street, and so, was lost to their view! The horse holders waited his return with no misgivings! The Kurd's heart bounded as he saw two Russian troopers in the street already in the saddle. They were in charge of a fine looking, riderless horse! He sprang down the street and neared them, recognizing at once the Legation's two mounted couriers!

Then his face at once brightened! "They can surely tell me where the soldiers are!" He laid a hand on the rein of the first courier, and made himself known in Russian!

"Where are the troops, and Colonel Soltykoff's little caravan? Speak! There are a hundred soldiers here waiting to charge the village! It is a matter of life and death! I am a friend of the Secret Service!" "We only wait here to take the old American missionary doctor down to Balfrush," cried the soldier addressed! "The Cossack company left here but last night, going down the road as if to the coast, purposely to deceive the villagers here! But, the Colonel is now twenty miles on the road to Puli Sefide!"

"Then they are lost! For these people will soon follow on, and butcher the whole party! I know Soltykoff and he will fight to the last cartridge!"

"The soldiers of Petrovitch are to leave the Balfrush road at daybreak and cut back across the plains to join Soltykoff again before night! It was only a ruse to deceive the villagers, if the troops were followed! If they could only be warned! They might reach him in time!"

Kassim sprang into the saddle of the horse, which was made ready for the missionary! "It is life and death now for all! Which of you has the best horse?"

"I have!" said the lightest of the two troopers! "Then!" cried Kassim, "you will be as rich as a prince

for life, if you ride like the wind, and warn Soltykoff that the Persians will surely attack him before night fall! Let him hide in some strong place! We will go down the valley and quickly bring up the Cossacks of Petrovitch! If they can come up in time, he is safe! Now! away as you value your life! Tell him that Mustapha Pasha leads on the Persians! He must fight to the death! We will get to the road and follow on to save him! They will wait outside here a half hour before they seek for me!" "And, the old missionary?" the second trooper said. "Let him sleep on! He is old and harmless! No one will hurt him!" The dispatch bearer wheeled his horse! "Cut away your saddle!" cried Kassim, as he dashed down into the gardens below the village, followed by the second trooper! The messenger was already three hundred yards away, riding straight toward the point where his desert craft told him he would surely strike Soltykoff's caravan on the road!

"Do you know where Petrovitch will double around?" cried Kassim, whose own life was now in jeopardy! Too well he knew that Mustapha would flay him alive if he were recaptured! He was a Moslem guide no more! Only now a poor follower of the Czar! "Yes!" said the courier, "there, at that high point of the mountain yonder, they were to break off and rejoin Soltykoff! He has kept five of the troopers with him in disguise, and he will also meet two of our secret couriers to-day in the early afternoon!"

"Then he may hold out till we can find Petrovitch!" thankfully cried Kassim. "Why did Soltykoff leave the troops?" was the Kurd's query, as they lost the little village of Assur from view! They were riding along swiftly under the shadows of the rolling foot hills, which would screen them from the eyes of Mustapha's band until the gray desert shades hid both men and horses! "They feared the treachery of the villagers of Assur, who bitterly hate the Russians, and we found they had sent off couriers to alarm the offi-

cials in the night, in several directions! The old missionary became terribly frightened and he would go no farther! So, he kept his own papers and passports, and we were ordered to take him slowly down to Balfrush to the sea! The soldiers of Petrovitch went out down the road toward the sea with much display, to mislead the villagers!" The trooper gazed anxiously back to note any pursuit! Kassim laughed. "We are safe! The horses of Mustapha's men are all jaded! It will be hours before they can pursue!"

"Yes, but they might get fresh horses at the village and send half the men ahead on a run!" fearfully said the guide! "And so we might be too late with Petrovitch's men, for the Persian Cossack regiment is splendidly armed!"

Kassim groaned as he urged his horse along. "You are right! But, no one saw us leave the village but a few children! Mustapha may be delayed an hour before he prepares for a dash! And we will lead Petrovitch back straight to the road! If we reach the high road before the Persians get past us, then Soltykoff is safe! If they are but a half hour or so ahead, then we must ride like the wind to the rescue! We can easily tell by the sandy trail if their column has passed!"

They had ridden three hours along in a grim silence, when Kassim's quick eye at last caught the gleam of carbine barrels and the flash of glittering accoutrements down below them, in the sandy valley five miles away! "There they are!" he cried! "Full run now! We must cut them off! If we reach them in an hour then Soltykoff is saved! Ride! Ride!"

Captain Petrovitch was leading his men smartly along, in a due southeast direction, hiding his command under the northern shade of the foothills, when he called his guide to his side by a wave of his hand! The trusty Legation followers had ridden the desert road to Reshd, Balfrush and Asterabad a score of times.

"I wish to come out on the high road an hour or

so before dark!" said the anxious Russian officer! "Then we will take up an easy hand gallop in the cool of the evening, and soon rejoin our friends. The animals will be fresh then! So far, no one can see our march from the heights of Assur, and when we do strike the road, even if spy's should see us, we will have rejoined Soltykoff long before they could interfere! I wish that I had not left him an hour!"

The guide pointed to a far knoll beyond, some dozen miles away! "The road winds out there beyond that old tower which you can see on that headland! If we strike for that, we will have about an hour of daylight! And we will find our friends not two hours' march beyond that! So we will cover all possible pursuit!" "Good!" cried Petrovitch. "Lead us then directly to that point, for we are masked until we open out on the plain at that spur!" He had been sweeping the far hillside with his field glasses. Suddenly he cried, "There is something wrong! Two men are riding down to cross our advance! And one of them is waving a white signal!" He closed the men up, and the troop soon jingled forward in a quick, rattling trot! The sinking afternoon sun threw its dark shadows over the gullies and rocky ravines as the two horsemen neared the troop!

Petrovitch called his sergeant! "Take four men and ride out and bring these men in! Be wary!" He gave the command, "Slow trot!" and then, "Walk!" Whirling in his saddle, he sternly cried, "Halt!" as he recognized Kassim, whose horse staggered and pitched over heavily, as the nimble Kurd sprang to the ground! Petrovitch gave the exhausted man a dram from his own flask, as he gasped out his story. Petrovitch's eyes blazed in wrath! The Russian officer hastily called his sergeant! "Dismount the men! Give me halt the command! The lightest men! The strongest horses! Nothing but their arms and double cartridge belts! Only girths and saddle blankets! You march on steadily to that tower with the rest of the

command, the pack mules, and bring on all the saddles! We will leave a couple of men hidden there to guide you to us if we pass beyond it! From there, send half your men, the freshest, ahead on the run to reinforce me! Let them go right on at a hand gallop on the road, till you find us! Give Kassim a good horse!"

"And a carbine!" cried the Kurd. "I have my pistols! I want a belt of ammunition!" There was a chorus of eager voices, as the Russian Cossacks sprang to their work! Lithe and lean, the bronzed troopers fell out one by one, ready for a ride for life! "Now!" yelled Petrovitch. "Not a man must pass me! Follow my lead!" and, with Kassim at his side, the Cossack captain fixed his eyes upon the gray round tower far away at the point of the overhanging stony hills! He set the pace with a cool judgment. "What is that tower?" sharply cried Petrovitch, as the squadron guide led the way, picking out the best going! The horses, lightened of their heavy trappings, leaped along, merrily tossing their heads!

"It is the Tower of Silence!" whispered the superstitious guide, "the eternal home of the dead!"

In an hour, Petrovitch had lost sight of his reserve, now marching steadily on behind! They had dropped down into the valley under the shadow of the southerly hills! The officer gazed at his men, well closed up and riding as easily as if trotting over the springy, velvet turf of the Don! "We are good for a couple of hours' race yet!" he proudly cried, as he turned to the guide! "How far is it from Assur to this old burial tower by the main road? They can not have already passed!" His words were unanswered, for the guide had galloped off to a knoll, where a great gulley stretched far away to the west! The setting sun streamed down over the mountain crests beyond them a half dozen miles away! Then the guide came racing down, with Petrovitch's glass still in his hand. "Now for the tower on the full run!" he cried. "There

are horsemen on the crest to the west, in hot chase of some one on the road! I could see the flash of arms! They must be in sight of our party!" Not a word was spoken, as Petrovitch rode out at a hot cross country run!

"Keep up with me now!" he yelled, and they sped away like the arrow loosed from the bow! The tower loomed up now not three miles away! "We have the best going!" cried the guide, "but, some of us must ride out and climb the cliff! It is the key to the whole position!" He pointed to the beetling rocky bluff, from whose exposed shoulder the materials for the rough round tower for the Persian dead had been quarried! "A dozen men well posted up there can hold a hundred at bay!" Petrovitch nodded grimly, and rode on, with his dark, fierce eyes watching the unmasking headlands for the first signs of the coming fight! "*On! On!*" he cried! "*Oh! God! to be in time now!*"

At daybreak, while Kassim cautiously led the advance of the Persians down towards Assur, Serge Soltyskoff had called Alan Randall and Denton to his side, as the little caravan pressed forward. Five of the disguised Cossacks carefully led the advance, and the two Legation couriers, with the three Europeans, watched the rear! The whole command was smartly pricking on, after a five hours' night rest. Ilma Falka, securely caged in her camel litter, slept bundled in her furs, while the led animal, nodding and gurgling, rocked along with its swaying stride! There was as yet no sign of danger near them!

Soltyskoff cast many an anxious look behind him as the daylight glimmered around, lighting up the winding hill road behind them! "This is almost too good to be true, Denton," said the Russian, "to get through these dangerous passes, without a skirmish! In this broken country we could easily be picked off by a few resolute fighters! But if we break out of these hills, on the great sandy plain there, then we could

stand off five times our number! I wish you, Randall, now to take the head of the column and force the pace! You, Denton, must stay at Countess Ilma's side and keep the camels well closed up! I will cover the rear! If we should be followed, myself, the guides, and three of the Cossacks will retire alternately, keeping any pursuers off the high ground! Once we are out of these hills, at the Tower of Silence, we can count on Petrovitch certainly being within an hour's march! I told him to keep his men well concealed, and to send a couple of men up in advance to the Tower of Silence, to see if we had passed! Then they were to ride along the Puli Sefide road and take us to his line of march!"

"It was a gross mistake to let him leave us at all!" gravely said Randall. "We have a very dangerous six hours' march, on a high road, too!"

"I propose to make a break for the coast when we are near enough the headwaters of the Talar and Tejen rivers to strike across the desert and follow down their banks! We must have water near us always. In that way, Petrovitch will have turned off any pursuit towards Balfrush, and we will drop off the road one by one, so as to leave no great trail! Then any pursuers would follow on to Puli Sefide! We will go to the north of it and around it! So we will miss any parties traveling hitherwards, and these fellows will search the hills! For I am sure that the Persians will turn off and follow Petrovitch's troops! I told him to ride in open order and leave no trail when he breaks off the Balfrush road to join us before sun-down! They will blunder on down to Balfrush!" "If we are attacked?" cried Paul Denton, who had been gloomily silent since Petrovitch had departed for his ruse! "Then, one of the guides will lead you right on to the Tower of Silence. Push ahead for that and leave us to do the holding off the enemy! They may envelop us, or get there first!" sadly answered the American!

"That is the one thing which we must prevent! It

is for you two men to push on! We will make no nconday halt to-day, for we can easily turn off the road and hide very comfortably in the sand dunes to-night! But, Petrovitch will then have joined us! He knows his work! He is a Ukraine wolf, in all the cunning of the steppes!"

There had been no halt save a brief breathing spell at noon! The jaded animals were regirthed, and the riders relieved them a few moments of their weight, as the anxious principals conferred in secret! Paul Denton alone had stolen away to murmur a few words to the woman who had not, as yet, missed the protection of Petrovitch's troops! The two guides pointed to a jutting point located out to the north far below them, in the broken foothills! "The open desert!" they cried. The gray, dreary desert lay below them there, its drifted hummocks and sandy ridges stretching off like the lines of meeting ocean tides! "In three hours we will surely be there! There lies the Tower of Silence!" said the two Legation couriers, after orienting themselves!

"Fix that knoll in your minds," earnestly cried Solytkoff. "Don't lose it from sight! For, Petrovitch will surely direct his march upon that, hiding below these crests! And, now forward, as fast as we can drive along! Thank God! we have been passed so far to-day by no travelers! There is no one to carry along the news! And there are two or three practicable cut-offs to the coast when we strike the plain! After dark we can hide out in the hummocks with perfect safety! Our guides can easily find Petrovitch! To-morrow night, we will camp way over there!" and the anxious man pointed to where the Caspian lay, not five days' march away!

An hour before sunset, the Tower of Silence itself was at last visible, a mile below them, for they were within five hundred feet of the level of the plain, sloping gently to the north and east! "There!" cried the guide in triumph, "Petrovitch is under the slopes below

us to the left!" "Hasten! Hasten!" cried Soltykoff, spurring forward to urge on Randall! "One single hour more and we will be again with our friends!" He rode his horse out to the top of a little knoll and gazed back at the long winding road, following the northern side of the long, sloping ravine they had descended for two hours! The setting sun gilded the western saddle of the rolling mountains behind them! The caravan was already out of sight and covered by the lower slopes of the spur, at the foot of which the Tower of Silence lay!

Serge Soltykoff swept the windings of the road behind him, scanning it with his field glass! There was nothing in view, save a few vultures wheeling high in air over a dead camel which they had noted by the roadside! Suddenly he dashed down the road at full speed, for the twinkle of lance heads had appeared on the far away saddle, and there were dark spots quickly moving along over the hills! "*Was it the enemy?*"

"It can't be Petrovitch! He never would climb these mountains! It would be simple madness!" was the stern Russian's last thought, as he galloped up to the side of Randall! The Tower of Silence was now but eight hundred yards away, and partially unmasked by the sloping rocky point!

"We are pursued!" he yelled. "Hurry down to the tower! Get your party inside! Mind and save all the ammunition! Hobble your horses on the other side! Man the walls! Shoot one of the camels and barricade the door! I'll hold them back here and fight slowly over the hills and join you!"

Then Soltykoff quickly chose his five men! The caravan was quickly sweeping away, down the road on a wild run, as the Colonel gave the guide his last orders. "You three men are to hide in the angles of these hills, keeping above these coming men! Retire along the crest, and keep us well covered! We will delay them here and alternate in retiring with you. If

they make a rush, we will all join you and go down fighting along the crest of the ridge to the tower! We must hold the bluff above the tower as long as we can! We will ambush them here and drive them down into the ravine! They must not get the high ground! Not a shot till I fire first! Then, make every bullet tell!" Their own steeds had been driven away after the caravan, and not a single sign of the presence of man was visible!

Soltykoff, with his heavy Berdan at a ready, grimly loosened his doubled cartridge belts, as twenty men came in sight, spurring down the road above them. He had posted his five men strongly now, and each rifleman knew his duty! "The man who throws one cartridge away may lose the day! *Remember!*" cried the Colonel.

Soltykoff's heart beat high! The pent up rage of his soul found expression in one growl, "Mustapha! Face to face at last! If the dog is only there! They must have seen our party below!" and he watched like a tiger at bay! It was indeed so, for the score of men clustered together, and waited till double their number joining them were slowly straggling down in plain sight! One single horseman, a burly rider, seemed to direct them, and the score of the advance came now briskly trotting down the winding road below the crest! They were near enough at last to show the well known uniform of the Persian Cossacks, and behind them a man in turban and flowing robes wildly waved the second squad onward with a naked sabre!

The jingle of trappings and patter of the horses' feet broke the silence! The Russian Colonel lay ready to meet his mortal foe! "*Now!*" yelled Soltykoff in a ringing voice to his men, as he threw forward his Berdan, and the leading Persian pitched heavily over his horse's head, falling prone and dead. The crack of five heavy rifles sent the advance squad dashing off in a tumult, and floundering wildly down into the ravine! Three Persians sprawled in the road and their

riderless horses dashed madly along, clattering down the cañon! There was a steady fusillade, until the last of the pursuing squad were lost in the scrubby bushes below the road!

"I've gained a good half hour!" grimly cried Soltykoff, as he led his hidden men over to the highest crest, and the six men took up a post behind the rocky crags, for the second band of Persians were led out above them on the ridge by the brave horseman in the flowing robes! A few random shots whistled down the pass, but Soltykoff's men lay waiting in safety behind the crags! They could now see the scattered horsemen of the advance floundering across the ravine below! "Out of range! Wait for these fellows!" said the Colonel. "Don't fire now till I give the word!" A dozen of the second band had dismounted and ran down the ridge with their carbines at a trail, while the rest of the horsemen, divided in two bands, hid under the crest on either side!

"We'll give them a killing volley from here, and then work down the ridge to the tower! For our own people are surely safely inside now! Three of you watch that side, and three of us this! The moment of the second attack is near!"

And, driven on by their shouting officers, the excited Persians came on reluctantly in range! There was nothing visible for them to fire at! The six men lay hidden with true Cossack art behind the high out-cropping rocks!

Soltykoff's eye ran along his rifle sights! He eagerly waited for that man with the sabre! "It is your life or mine to-day!" the Russian growled, as he felt for his breast where Ilma Falka's handkerchief lay! There were some random shots whistling now down the ridge, and Serge could hear the shouting of fierce voices, urging on the men above them! But there was a new danger to face! The scattered band in the ravine had now rallied and were riding far away beyond dan-

ger, bending their march in safety to the Tower of Silence!

"They'll get a hot surprise there!" Soltykoff grimly laughed! For, he knew brave Paul Denton's desperation! And Alan Randall's stern resolution! Every man under their command, too, was fighting for his own life, as well as for the safety of the Magyar maiden!

Soltykoff sought in vain for the form of the turbaned leader, as a dozen mounted Persians pressed swiftly along the crest of the ridge within eighty yards. They were too near to hesitate!

"All together! Now! Continue firing!" cried the Colonel, and the ringing rifles woke the echoes! When the smoke drifted away, there was not a horseman in sight, but four men lay writhing on the rocky bench above them! Then, the quick rattle of firing breaking out from below told the forlorn hope that the first band had attacked the tower! Ilma Falka was facing her deadly foes!

"Quick! now! To the crest! Follow me!" cried Soltykoff, as he led his men along the brown hillside to the south of the main crest overhanging the Tower of Silence! The cliff ended abruptly, where the face of the jutting rocks had been opened to make an emplacement for the sacred edifice staring open to the sky, where the Persian dead were exposed to the rays of the sun god, and abandoned to the fowls of the air! A ghastly refuge! Soltykoff dropped on his hands and knees and crawled to the edge of the quarry, some fifty feet deep! There, below them, a dozen dismounted men of the enemy were trying to drag away a dead camel lying before the narrow door, which was just wide enough to admit a single body! Soltykoff's warning hand brought his followers to his side!

"Loosen all your revolvers!" he whispered. "After one volley with the rifles, use your pistols!" There were balls vainly whistling down the ridge over their heads, as Soltykoff aimed at the solid mass of men,

whose yells and screams rose in fury when one after another of their number staggered away from the narrow crevice! There were ringing rifles at work within! The pursuers above yelled in triumph! The six men fired a volley into the struggling mass, and, then their revolver shots followed the yelling fugitives! Warring cries broke the silence! A wild cheer rang out as Petrovitch's troopers dashed around the base of the broken cliff in full view! Soltykoff shouted, "*Saved! Saved!*" and turning his head, gazed anxiously up the ridge! There was a thickly clustered body of men rushing down upon them, now led by the turbaned sabre wielder. "Load! Load!" yelled Serge! "Stand firm! Face about!" he shrieked, as he slipped in a fresh rifle cartridge. He felt a sharp pain in his left shoulder as he threw his Berdan up, and then fired point blank at Mustapha, not fifteen paces away! The tall Pasha pitched forward, and his sabre clattered down the rocks, as the writhing body rolled almost to the very feet of the wounded Russian! But, his own brave men dropping on one knee, were now pouring shot after shot into the confused mass above!

"Over the cliff, over! Get down behind the tower!" gasped Soltykoff, but a wild Russian yell above him told of a sudden change in the situation! A Cossack cheer was heard as Kassim led the late arrivals of Petrovitch's troop down over the crest! The Kurd was bounding in advance! He sprang to Soltykoff's side, as the wounded officer faltered, "Cut off their retreat! Hold the road behind them! Quick! quick!" The rout was complete, for twenty of Petrovitch's men were now ranged on guard around the Tower of Silence, and two score more were spurring over the plain, gathering up the craven Persians, who had thrown their arms away and scattered in abject flight! The victory was won!

There was a ringing shout from below, and Alan Randall, pistol in hand, came joyously clambering up the crag!

Soltykoff had sunk down upon a shelving rock and his men were tenderly holding up his wearied head!

"How is it?" cried Randall, his face paling at the sight of their wounded chief!

"Are you all right?" gasped the Russian! "All right! Only Paul has a ball through his right arm! One man killed! The two women are safe!"

"Turn that man over!" the Colonel called to the nearest knot of Cossacks! There was a stony smile of grim revenge on Soltykoff's face!

"It is that damned renegade dog, and I killed him alone in fair fight! *This ends the story!* Search him at once!"

Doctor Randall's busy fingers were soon at work at Soltykoff's blood-stained garments! The shoulder was bared! "Hurrah!" the American cried, "only through the muscles! Nothing to keep you back! Wait here till I bring up my case! It's on the dead camel!" Something had dropped at Soltykoff's feet as Randall clambered down the cliff. It was Ilma Falka's handkerchief, the fatal token!

The Russian painfully bent over and picked it up! His wounded arm gave him the sharpest pain as he leaned over the body of Mustapha Pasha! Then Soltykoff deliberately soaked the bit of muslin in Janos Kinsky's blood!

"Magda! Magda! You are avenged!" he cried, as Petrovitch came bounding down the height! The Cossack commander's face shown in the light of victory. "I have them all cut off! They have surrendered to the last man! The commander owns, too, that they had orders not to fire on us under any circumstances! What shall I do?"

"Picket the road and let no one pass on. Send a detail of the prisoners to collect the dead! Gather up all the loose horses! Get the women at once out of that gloomy hole below, and hide our evening camp in here, behind the Tower! We will disarm all these Persian fellows to-morrow, and we will make a straight

break for the Tejan River and Farahabad! We will turn these fellows loose by and by, but, dismounted, in the desert! I'll take the commander and ten of them along as hostages, all their arms can be loaded on the captured horses under guard! At Farahabad I'll seize the best boat, and coast around the shore to the boundary! You can march along to Asterabad!"

Soltykoff had now finished the contents of Petrovitch's flask, and Randall was already bandaging his shoulder.

"Hurrah for the fighting doctor!" cried the Cossacks.

"But how shall we officially explain this fight?" dubiously said Petrovitch.

"They opened fire first, led on by this dead scoundrel!" said Soltykoff, "and, we will make the Persians admit it! This dead dog urged the soldiers on! He was in the lead."

"Here is the man to whom you owe your life," said the Cossack Captain, as Kassim came springing down the ridge.

"Your fortune is made for life, Kassim!" said Soltykoff. "You have loyally paid back the debt you owed for your own!"

Soltykoff was closely examining the articles taken from the renegade's body. In a purse he found the little cross and chain and three rings.

"Ah!" sighed Soltykoff. "The poor child's stolen trinkets! Let us go down. Bring him down there! She must see him cold in death, and I want his whole raiment and trappings kept as an absolute proof!"

It was a singular scene as the night fell upon them there, on the edge of the vast desert.

A picket of five trusted men held the pass, and another cordon was spread across the plain below. The dead had all been dragged away, and a dozen bright camp fires were hidden by the great circular tower where the tents were pitched on the shelf between it and the face of the quarry. Within the dismal

enclosure the wails and cries of the imprisoned Persians waked the echoes. At the door four armed troopers sternly confined the motley mass within. The body of the slain camel still barricaded the narrow gap.

The victor Cossacks joked and laughed merrily as they lay in bivouac, around the tent where Ilma Falka slept, guarded by the men who had so bravely faced death for her. The horses, under a strong guard, nipped away at the bitter prairie herbs, and the wild winds wailed shrilly over the great plain.

Serge Soltykoff had led the Magyar girl aside to where a sentinel watched over the body of her dead foeman.

"You must see his face! I slew him to save you, and to avenge your mother!"

The Lost Countess shuddered as she whispered:

"It is the man! But why did he hate me?"

"Ah! My child!" said Soltykoff. "That you must learn from your mother's own lips!"

The Russian Colonel solemnly gave the girl her three rings and her neck cross.

"They stole them from me when they drugged me at Constantinople," faltered Ilma. "And now, you say that I shall soon see my home, my darling mother and Arpad! Oh! that you could wing this news to him!"

Soltykoff sighed. "We have a long road before us. Sleep, my child, and, God be with you!"

For he dared not tell her of the mother's death in life or of the brother who had died for her. Even the cup of victory has its bitter dregs!

Petrovitch, Soltykoff, Randall and Paul Denton made themselves a snug retreat near the guarded tent of Ilma Falka. Kassim was lying on the watch, sabre in hand, before the door. He was now the lion of the hour! For he had led the support up the ridge to chase off the overwhelming odds against Soltykoff. He had the keen eye of the born partisan leader.

"You made a gallant fight, Colonel," said Denton, whose lacerated arm kept him now from sleep.

"Tell me your own story, Paul," said Serge Soltykoff, who lay with his shoulder pillowed high on a bundle of captured furs. The jeweled sabre of Janos Kinsky, the renegade—Mustapha Pasha no more—lay at his side with other spoils of the day's battle to the death.

"We pushed quickly down the pass," simply said Denton, "and Randall bravely covered the retreat with four men, as we dashed around the bluff and at last found the entrance to the Tower. I got the women out and hastily dragged them into the Tower. Just then, your first firing was heard sounding up the glen. The men hastily passed in the water skins and all our ammunition packages. They worked like the veterans they are. All the guns were inside, and I was trying to explain our situation to Ilma, who was nearly frantic with the horrid sights within. Randall and his men were stationed on watch, at the foot of the road and, when he saw the Persians rallying across the canyon, he rushed back to barricade the entrance at once. We had pitched all the lighter baggage within. It was Randall himself, who shot the camel and we had hardly dragged him to the door and filled the orifice up with bundles and loose baggage, when your heavy firing above on the cliff alarmed us all. Ilma and the Armenian woman I had hidden behind the raised mud-walled platforms of the dead, and I had quickly thrown the robes of the camel litters over them to hide the dreadful sights. We ranged ourselves behind the other platforms, ready to open fire when the first hand was laid on our barricade. I was seized by the arm as our men within discharged a first volley into the doorway. It was Ilma, who claimed one of my pistols. 'Promise me, Paul, as you love me!' she cried, 'if I do not kill myself, you must kill me! I will not fall into those devil's hands again! I am a soldier's daughter!'"

"'I swear it!' I yelled, as I bade the peasant woman drag her down behind the body platforms, and then the fight went madly on. We were splendidly sheltered

there behind the earthen parapets of the dead, and every movement of the men crowding at the door cost them a life. I never felt my own wound, for, as your heavy firing began taking them in the rear, we heard also the cheer of Petrovitch's gallant men as they dashed up. I sprang to Ilma's side for I thought the enemy were doubled, but, the courier cried out: 'A Russian cheer! It is Petrovitch!' Randall was the first to spring over our barracks. He is a brick, a fighting missionary, and a good doctor."

"You are a pretty game man yourself, Denton," said Randall, with admiring eyes.

"Ah! I had something to fight for," was the young lover's response.

Soltykoff was silent, but he thought of the beloved woman far away.

The three brothers in arms clasped hands in silence as they slept on their battlefield.

With the streakings of the dawn, the whole command was on the alert. Soltykoff entered the gloomy tower where round mud walls, forty feet high, enclosed a circle eighty feet in diameter. There was an inner parapet wall six feet below the upper rim, and a score of raised platforms of varied height, made up of rocks plastered in mud. In these hollowed, coffin-like cups there lay a number of openly exposed bodies. The fowls of the air had plucked out their eyes. The Persian prisoners had recognized those who had gone to eternal bliss as the ones who had lost the right eyes, and those doomed to perdition whose left eyes had been first removed.

Before noon the bodies of the newly slain were laid away within the gloomy, lonely tower, and, there, Serge Soltykoff took his last grim look of the face of the man who had died by his avenging bullet! The long train had wound out over the sandy plain, the four couriers and Kassim proudly leading.

"We have reinforced the Persian dead. These fellows can hold the fort, now!" gaily said Soltykoff, as

he left two men behind to block up the entrance with boulders.

"Strike for Farahabad now, if you kill the horses!" cried Soltykoff. "The Persian officer will lie out of the whole affair to save his head."

And Ilma Falka rode on with her lover's kisses fresh on her lips, but she still clung to the pistol which he had given her in the Tower of Silence!

CHAPTER XV

SOLTYKOFF'S COUP DE MAIN!—KASSIM THE SUPER-CARGO!—"TIS THE 'OLGA'!"—IN THE NEGARISTAN!—AT MOSCOW!—THE SONG OF THE BELLS!

The command journeyed on in an anxious silence until the hour of noon-day rest. Before them a great crescent was formed far away by low wooded hills reaching out into the gray waste like the arms of a giant Zulu impi of black warriors. There was a low ridge beyond melting away in the desert, through which a gap was opened leading to the Caspian, and, marching directly for this, the keen-eyed Kassim led on the advance guard of the command. The Persian prisoners marched a rifle-shot in the rear, under the guard of fifty riflemen. There was a little council at the halting place.

"I have two objects in view in keeping these fellows aloof," said Soltykoff, the central figure of the confidential circle. Only Paul Denton was missing! For he had led Ilma Falka apart to gaze back at the stern round Tower of Silence now, a mere gray blur upon the dark background, a dozen miles away.

"First, they will not overhear us, nor recognize the presence of the two women. Second, it would not annoy the Countess if we had to shoot a few of them.

I have had Kassim warn this officer that if one single man escapes, the rest will be shot and left for that company of free lances of the air."

He grimly pointed to where the clouds of hungry vultures were wheeling in triumph over the ghastly Tower of Silence. The Bringers of Fate had already swarmed down into the interior of the charnel tower!

"Right eye, or left eye, there's no mistake about Mustapha Pasha's ultimate destination. The birds need not squabble over him!" remarked Randall.

"But, can you force a safe passage through the coast settlements?" said the anxious doctor, as he listened to the last of Soltykoff's route directions to Kassim and Captain Petrovitch.

"Of course, I would not use open force. That would be madness," replied the Colonel. "Here is where the fox's skin pieces out the lion's hide. I sent our two best guides on at daybreak to force their way back to Teheran with a secret dispatch to the Russian Minister. He will soon know that the Persian troops have most unjustifiably attacked us, and he will threaten the Shah himself with the thunders of the Czar's cannon at his unguarded doors. He will, of course, only make a noisy hubbub as to the violation of our 'laissez passer' permission for the march to the sea. That will explain and justify fully any measures which I may take for the safety of the command. No, there will be no more fighting."

"I am glad of that," cheerfully cried Randall. "For you are hors de combat and Denton is only fit, now, to take care of our young visiting Countess."

"Let him do it. They have all their lovemaking before them. It will keep his hands full for some time. His cure is certain. He won't trouble the surgeons much."

"And, you own?" said the young American. "Many a man would throw up the sponge with that shoulder."

"Oh! That will get well as soon as I reach Moscow,"

said Soltykoff, turning away with a curious smile. "All I need now is wit enough to fool the Persians at Farahabad."

"Well, Kassim can supply all your deficiencies," said Petrovitch, laughing as he sprang on his horse to lead away the head of the command.

"I will attend to all the fighting business till we see the blue and white St. Andrew's Cross floating over the 'Olga.' But I can't see how you will get through Farahabad," insisted the Captain.

"Petrovitch, leave that to me," laughed Soltykoff. "All you have to do is to think about ordering a new major's uniform. You polished off those fellows as neatly as I ever saw a troop work."

There was a howl of dismay three days later as Colonel Soltykoff sternly turned the main body of his Persian prisoners loose on the headwaters of the Tejen River. The hint that any of them following the command would be instantly shot, served to give lightness to their leaden heels as they sadly wended their way back on foot towards Assur. Only their commander and ten of the prisoners, as hostages, were marched along, under guard, herding all the captured horses laden with the useless arms. For, Soltykoff had gleefully watched the whirlpools of the Tejen swallow up the cartridges of the prisoners.

"They are at home. They do not need the means of mischief," soberly said the Russian Colonel. "Do you see," he gaily said, "these fellows will not reach Assur for a week, and not be at Teheran in a fortnight?"

"Trust to them to weave a web of satisfactory lies. They know that I will execute vengeance on these principal prisoners, if they dare to follow on. And my secret couriers will have arrived at Teheran. Our astute Minister will raise a clamor that will make even the Shah shake hidden in his marble walled pleasure domes. He will be glad to make the humblest official apology now. But, we will be well out of the Land of

the Lion and the Sun long before that theatrical thunder storm breaks."

The increasing cheerfulness of Paul Denton seemed to argue a miraculous recovery for his amendment only kept pace with that of Countess Ilma Falka. Doctor Randall only found it necessary to limit the tête-a-têtes of the united lovers.

"They have their whole lives before them," he seriously said. "You do not seem to mend as fast, Colonel?"

"I told you," gravely answered Soltykoff, "I shall not be in good repair till I reach Moscow. It is a holy city, you know," and so they swept down to the sea through the lonely glen.

It was their last night on the wooded banks of the Tejen, and the two Russian officers had given to Kassim a mysterious mission to perform at Farahabad. With two of the official courier guides and two armed followers in Persian garb, the quick-witted Kurd had gaily ridden out ahead in the night. The coast line was familiar to the dispatch bearers who, by boat and shore road, had often journeyed between Balfrush and Asterabad on the White Czar's secret quests.

But, there was a hidden gloom and doubt in the minds of Randall and even the bold Captain Petrovitch. The two lovers were wandering in their veiled happiness under the evening star, and Soltykoff had carefully hidden his large command at a fair distance from the road. The few peasants whom they had passed were quite familiar with the uniform of the Persian Cossacks. The timorous herders fled away, lest the fierce swordsmen of their own despotic master might harry them as custom gave a sad privilege. For the troops of Persia took and paid not!

It was noon when the caravan, which the guide had carefully led along away from the main road, swept around a winding ridge, and Soltykoff shouted merrily to Paul Denton. The young lover's ears were now only attuned to the sounds reaching him through the

dark curtains of the camel litter. When Colonel Serge drew aside the curtain with his own hand, he cried joyfully.

"Look out now, Ilma! Here is the Caspian!" And the girl's eyes filled with sudden tears, as the shining waters of the inland ocean glittered before her in the sun, not a mile away. With the extremest care, the two Russians led their command down to a dense grove but a rifle shot from the shore.

There was a bold bluff veiling the approaches to the little village of Farahabad, a league to the west.

There were a few tiny fishing boats drawn up on the sand, but nothing else in sight. The peasants were not on the strand.

Colonel Soltykoff's face fell in a blank disappointment. Petrovitch's orders had already formed the Cossacks in a line around the prisoners and the whole command at once addressed itself to the business of refreshment.

"I leave you in command, Randall," moodily said Soltykoff. "Petrovitch will ride down to the shore with me."

The two officers disappeared, followed by a dozen mounted men led by a sergeant. The escort cautiously skirted the low shrubbery while the two officers rode along in advance to the bluff.

"He can not have failed us," growled Serge. "We could make Asterabad in two days, but, we might be detained there. I hesitate to act with any further violence. Once at sea, we are safe. Where is Kassim?"

"Look there!" suddenly cried Petrovitch, grasping excitedly his wounded arm. "There is a barge coming around the point!"

And then Serge Soltykoff gave a cheer, as a double lateen sailed barge swept around the point, its rowers aiding, with their long sweeps, the work of the fluttering breeze. A man perched in the prow was waving a white turban as a signal.

It was Kassim, the supercargo!

Before the two officers reached the strand, a second barge, and yet a third, dragged lazily around in full view.

"Now, for the last ordeal!" excitedly cried out Soltykoff. "We must get the crews all ashore. You had better retire and handle the hidden men. Let me meet Kassim. What I wish to do is to get the men of the three crews ashore to aid in embarking the animals of the caravan. The very moment I give you the signal, I wish your men to take and hold the boats. I mean to capture this little navy!"

Captain Petrovitch watched his wounded superior riding slowly down to the strand where Kassim had already warped in one of the barges. The two others had drawn in outside of the first in order to use the inshore boats as bridges to embark their loads. The three had been hired to transport animals to Astera-bad.

Kassim was proudly enacting the supercargo, as he led the masters of the three boats at once ashore to meet the anxious Soltykoff. There was some grave haggling about price until the village mariners had adjusted the rates for transferring a whole caravan to Asterabad. It was an event in their maritime lives. A windfall.

"I will need all your men to help with the camels," said the adroit Kassim. "Hasten them then, now, ashore. We are at prayers in yonder grove. We must be off at once. For, the breeze serves now."

Colonel Soltykoff sat on his horse watching the lonely blue expanse of the silent sea before him. The long shore line melted away to the east where a few dark spots marked the promontory of Miyankal. There was a dark, low line hanging over the horizon there.

"My God, is that the 'Olga's' smoke?" the wornout leader cried, and then, turning in his saddle, he threw up his hand, for Kassim, the artful, had led all the unsuspecting bargemen past the copse where Petrovitch

with his guard watched for the signal to come on. Soltykoff threw out his arm, and the troopers came into view, briskly trotting over to the strand. The slumbering sailor left in each barge was affrighted as an armed Cossack sprang upon each barge. Captain Petrovitch, with a couple of well armed troopers, stood by the shore lines at the little cattle landing. Then Soltykoff spurred up his horse and gaily galloped back into the midst of the excited caravan. Every soul was busied with a hasty scramble to the beach. The astonished boatmen were quickly reassured by that most genial of supercargoes—Kassim the Kurd! It was Soltykoff himself who led Ilma Falka across the barges to the outer one. A dozen stout Cossacks were soon busied in rapidly passing over the slender belongings of the official party. Before Ilma Falka could hide herself in the shelter of the little barge cabin, the Russian troop horses, in two long lines, were denuded of their trappings. With shout and song, the rejoicing Russians piled high the prows with their accoutrements and saddle gear. There was a guard of twenty men on the outer barge, and the troop horses were all led aboard the two inner vessels, tied facing each other in double lines in the shallow cattle droghers. The Persian commander and his ten men were now drawn up in front of the landing.

And, Paul Denton, standing at Ilma Falka's side, watched the freshening breeze and chafed in a vain excitement.

"Why do we linger?" he cried, watching the last group of their party. And, at his side, her heart beating in a wild tumult, Ilma Falka's face was fanned by the fresh breeze. Her dancing eyes noting the whirling sea birds in their fearless flight of freedom. The light of liberty was shining on her happy face. Serge Soltykoff was the very last man to leave the strand, and Kassim, the supercargo, stood pistol in hand, at his side, as he cried "Cast off!" The merry Russian soldiers then struck up their wild regimental songs

as the busy boatmen loosened the lines and the three barges floated free. Kassim and the two guides, with a sergeant, commanded the first. Petrovitch the second, and Colonel Soltykoff's guard of twenty men, with the luggage, trimmed fairly the outside shallop. Willing hands aided the timid boatmen as the great lateen sails were at once loosened. The light barge then gained headway and smartly dashed away over the shallow Caspian. Serge Soltykoff stood in triumph at the prow with folded arms, his eyes strained upon Miyankall Point far away there to the east. He turned to look upon the two barges dashing along in rear, and his face suddenly lit up with a smile. For there, nestling in the stern of the boat, the Hungarian girl lay with her head resting upon her wounded lover's breast. "I will have my own revenge—at Moscow"—mused Soltykoff, and his heart grew strangely light, as the suburbs of Farahabad faded behind them. The last thing Soltykoff had observed to indicate the presence of his defeated enemies was the then curling smoke of a camp fire, and the straggling animals wandering at will over the sedgy meadows. "I don't fancy that fellow will hurry back to make his report at Teheran," laughed Soltykoff, as he saw Alan Randall seated by the foremast. The young doctor was philosophically conning over his own future. "I have told this man that if he lies out of his scrape, successfully, and throws the whole blame of the encounter upon that dead dog Kinsky, I will screen him through our ambassador. Otherwise, his head will be in jeopardy." "Trust to him! I know the Persian artfulness in lying deceit," said Randall.

Soltykoff's heart suddenly smote him. "See here, my dear boy, what shall we do for you? Where do you wish to go?" Alan Randall spoke dreamily. He was warring with himself. "Of course, you know that my return would officially endanger my colleagues. If I should take station again at Trebizond or Erzeroum, I would be slyly assassinated. I think I will make for

Odessa, if we escape, and, on a secret report to our chief at Constantinople, go on to America, without crossing the Moslem boundaries. Our people there will close up all my little affairs." Serge Soltykoff eyed the game young fellow curiously. "You will go on by Moscow. I propose to show you what a Russian home welcome is like!"

The sun was setting as the hawk-eyed Colonel again caught the black smear of dark smoke hovering near the horizon, beyond the point, now only five hours' sail distant. He turned and spoke a few words to the grave Persian who was piloting the barge, signalling his commands briskly to the sailors. And, when he had heard the boatman's answer, he walked back to where Paul Denton was engaged in a mysterious conversation with Ilma Falka. The excited girl clasped his hand and drew the tall soldier down to her side. "Did you save my little house that I rode in, and my good, patient camel?" Her voice trembled in eagerness. "Kassim has the whole affair, camel and all, in his boat." "And, will there be news, good news, to-night?" The anxious woman gazed at the receding shore. The boatmen now spread out the evening repast of eggs, dried fish and tea, while Denton produced their last simple stores. "Sleep in peace, my darling child," cried the soldier. "I will take you, myself!" The young Countess slept, wrapped in her fleecy fur robes under the watchful eyes of her happy lover. Only once did Paul Denton steal away from his post. It was when Soltykoff laid a hand upon his arm. The Russian Colonel led the young American to the prow of the barge which was gliding steadily along, followed at a mile by the heavier laden boats with the animals. A simple lantern swinging on each mast told of the safety of the convoy. It was long after midnight when the tall form of Serge Soltykoff bent over the poor, hunted child of the woman he loved. And, with his grave, gentle voice, he then gently awakened the Magyar girl.

"Ilma, my darling child!" he said, as he laid a hand upon her arm. The girl sprang up in alarm, as hoarse cries of the night arose. But Paul Denton's voice rang out in chorus with Soltykoff's cry, as a red and green light flashed out before them, blinding them as they all peered into the darkness. Ilma Falka fell upon her wounded lover's breast, for they had cried "It is the 'Olga!'"

And, the woman, whose waking to the joyful summons, had carried her away in a senseless ecstasy, never knew of the ringing cheers sounding out when a dozen stout arms bore the girl into the splendid cabin of the Czar's Caspian patrol boat. Doctor Randall leaned over her couch there, as the Armenian nurse gave the exhausted girl the water in which he had deftly dropped the sleeping potion of mercy. The doctor's work was done! He only feared lest joy might unhinge her reason after the long ordeal. When Colonel Soltykoff next morning was led into the darkened cabin, he drew aside the silken curtain and showed to her a mist-covered level horizon, sweeping away far behind them. "There is the road you have come, my darling child, and, you have now left all your fears behind. To-morrow night you will sleep in the palace of the Governor General at Baku." No one marvelled that the girl with a glad cry, threw her arms around the neck of the stern soldier, and hid her head in his bosom, sobbing like a child.

"Come away," gravely said Randall. "There is a joy that kills," and he whispered to the Armenian nurse, while Soltykoff and Paul Denton went out together upon the deck. There, Captain Petrovitch and Kassim were standing, gazing on the blue and white cross, the Czar's flag, streaming out behind. "I am a Russian, now," said Kassim, as he gravely saluted.

Before the sun sank to rest, gilding the low line of hills far away before them, Ilma Falka had gazed around from the quarter deck upon the tranquil evening skies. "My mother! Arpad!" she whispered to

Soltykoff, "I will telegraph from Baku, for your mother to meet us at Moscow. Major Denton will bring her on with the rest. Your only safe way home is over Russian soil, and, my home shall be your home, till you are rested." The man who had risked his life to save her, dared not tell her of the fate of the gallant brother who had died, almost under the walls of the Red Pavilion!

When the morning broke over the still Caspian the "Olga" was speeding over the tranquil waters, her course laid directly for the Apsheron peninsula. Nothing was visible on the great inland sea but the triangular wake of the vessel, bounding forward under the utmost efforts of her engines. A few gulls hovered screaming hoarsely behind, and a fleet of little fishing boats dotted the blue expanse on the shallows.

Colonel Soltykoff was early on deck, and gaily laughed as the officers of the "Olga" offered him a contributed pick up uniform. "No," he smilingly said, "I left Baku in mufti, and I am not anxious yet to disclose my identity." The sympathetic officers dared not pry into the identity of the mysterious woman passenger who now, with her strange looking attendant, reigned in the commander's cabin. The bright sun climbed the heavens, and it was late before Doctor Randall emerged from the after cabin.

Paul Denton's face wore an expression of haggard anxiety. For, he had been so far denied the sight of the face of the woman he loved. When Doctor Alan Randall drew Colonel Soltykoff aside, there were hearty peals of laughter followed by a mysterious conference. And then, Serge Soltykoff sought the commander for a most interesting private interview. Randall at once dispelled all the fears of the anxious lover. "Cheer up, Denton!" he said. "My patient is making wonderful strides toward recovery. I will tell you a secret. I am going back to America, and the first woman I find who is the double of this brave girl, shall be my wife, if I have to toss physic to the dogs and

become a languishing lover. I thought she was all heroine. But yet, a woman, for there are many mirrors in that too gorgeous saloon of the commander!" "Countess Ilma Falka is tired of the garb of the Persian camel driver, and she knows now that the 'Olga's' guns are her grimly faithful guardians. The Shah has nothing more formidable than a cattle barge on the Hyrcanian Sea. Only the White Czar's war flag flies here on this magnificent lake. You will see Countess Ilma when they have finished the day's first labors. I left them with a pile of Persian shawls and Commander Katkoff's oriental draperies. I believe when Colonel Soltykoff has furnished forth the sailors' sewing kits, that you will be admitted to their presence." The sudden discovery of her bizarre appearance tells of the reflex tide of ruling feminine passion. And," he whispered, "I would advise you also to masquerade as a Russian officer in undress uniform. You are not a romantic figure in that servant's garb." Denton's face crimsoned. "Noblesse oblige," he said, stoutly. "I will not shed "these muddy vestments which grossly close me in till that gamest of Russians, Soltykoff, leads off. He may not wish to be officially known in this enterprise. But, Randall, go back to her—and, tell her,"—the seal of Venus rests yet upon the burning messages which the bearded Cupid departed with. The doctor laughed, and yet he proved a reliable messenger! A sudden thought struck Denton. He crossed the deck to where Soltykoff was exhibiting Mustapha's sabre to the wondering Katkoff. "What became of that Mollah—the green turbaned individual? Kassim tells me that he was missing after we left the Tower of Silence."

"I am afraid that we lost him on the way!" grimly said Colonel Serge. "The fact is," he whispered to Paul, "Petrovitch just had him shot on general principles, to discourage his future meddling kind. The Captain owes something to his splendid horses half used up in that rattling ride. It is the fate of the tale

bearer." "Ah!" mused Denton. "He got what few men get in this weary world, his just deserts! Do you know, Soltykoff," said Paul, "I would like to leave this tideless sea by the Volga and pass out to the Baltic, by the canal of the Tvertsa and Schlina. What a land is yours, what a power. Your public works are stupendous!"

"We are not asleep," proudly said Soltykoff. "What we get, we hold. In twenty years, for six months of the season, laden boats can be moved from the Black Sea to the Baltic, and down into the Caspian, without breaking bulk, and from the Pacific to the Arctic ocean, through Siberia, by the Amur and the canals joining our inland rivers there. Then, with the Trans-Siberian Railway connected with our existing roads to Merv and Tashkend, Russia will dominate Asia, control China, and menace India by our wonderful rail and inland waterways. For, the White Czar's flag never goes back. Old Strabo never dreamed of the unborn Colossus of the north when he chronicled the doings of the Rude Caspii. But this is all our own to-day!" He swept the sea horizon defiantly.

There was the merriest fancy dress dinner ever given on the lonely Caspian when Paul Denton was at last admitted to the presence of the rescued Countess. Draped in Persian shawls and the improvised robes of her sex, with her darkened skin and the crisp short curls still shaded with the dyes of Teheran, Ilma Falka was again an attractive woman. A strangely beautiful woman of a thrilling earnest loveliness. Her eyes rested in fond tenderness on Serge Soltykoff who sat next her in the place of honor, but she dropped her eyes in a strange confusion as Paul knelt reverently and kissed her hand.

"Princess Nourmahal came back to rule and reign!" he whispered. For well he understood the fond dissembling of the girl's heart which built up its battlements of womanly pride. It was the shrinking self-protection of her own regained self. For her mind now

turned fondly back to the pledge given in the rosy mazes of "My Lady's Walk." "Is there really no danger now?" whispered Ilma, as they drank to the Czar, their Imperial host, on the silent waters. "None, my darling child," said Soltykoff. "Two nights more and you will sleep in Baku. It is two-thirds Persian and Armenian. So, I must smuggle you ashore lest the noble English friends in Teheran be later made the victims of some dastardly revenge. The Governor General's family will provide all for you, and, within an hour from our arrival there, the news will be in Vienna, at Constantinople, and at Schloss Falkenstein! I will have the Governor's own special train, and, with five days' ride through to Vladikaukas, then you shall have your own private car till we all meet at Moscow. No one will know us!"

"Why meet there?" murmured Ilma. "Because, the Moslem spies will not know of our reunion, then! We must protect our little circle of loyal friends in Persia! The Russian Minister must play the part of an angry accuser, and thoroughly frighten the Shah's Ministers! Besides, Ilma," he whispered. "I wish to show your mother my dear old home!" Princess Nourmahal's little hand stole into the soldier's palm! She had been ministering to him, on the one side, and to her wounded lover on the other! "I understand you," she said, with softly shining eyes. "We are not to be strangers ever again! I owe my life to you!" Soltykoff then knew he had gained an ally for life! Commander Katkoff always treasured the great gray cloak which he proudly wrapped around Ilma Falka's pretty shoulders in the silence of the starlit night, when the "Olga" sped into the harbor of Baku! One by one, the gallant officers pressed the hand of their fair unknown guest! It was only next day that the sailors broke into three ringing cheers when a splendid largesse was showered upon them! In a superb silver frame, a portrait of the fairy Princess Nourmahal still ornaments the officers' cabin of the dashing dispatch

corvette "Olga." The simple inscription "To my Brothers," was Ilma Falka's pledge of gratitude!

There was clattering of orderlies, and the roll of carriages echoing around the Governor's Palace till long after midnight, on the evening of the landing! Serge Soltykoff and the Governor sat late in serious converse! Randall and the overjoyed Denton were now restlessly discussing all the victorious quest, when Soltykoff broke in upon them, and led them into the library of the happy official. "Gentlemen!" said the Colonel, "we will leave Baku on our special train the first moment we can rescue Countess Ilma to-morrow from the ladies of this hospitable family! I have tried to tell them that even a wedding trousseau, can be had at Moscow! It is heaped up with the spoils of the old world, the moyen age, and all the modern glories of Vanity Fair! Our dispatches too have all been answered back! We must be on the road, for else our Vienna party will be there, before us! I have to make room for your mother, Paul. Major Fraser Denton and his daughter, Bela Batthyani and—the Countess Magda! I must be there to set my house in order!" The veteran turned his eyes away for Paul Denton read his thoughts! The cure will be a rapid one—at Moscow! "So, the sleeping cup was drained! It was Denton, with tear-dimmed eyes, who cried "*To the Czar!*"

"There is Petrovitch, and Kassim!" said Paul. "I'll not see Petrovitch suffer!" genially said His Excellency. "I've made him a major, over night! Soltykoff here will get him the order for a permanent aide de camp's rank with me! The Czar will decorate him, and, the young ladies here, will spoil him! For the story of his devotion will lead to his own capture soon! As for Kassim—between Soltykoff and myself—he will be chief of the whole native secret service of the border! Look to your own reward, Denton!" the Governor smiled. "It lies near you—at your side, now!"

And in her stately guest room, the Hungarian maiden slept in peace with a happy heart! For the

hoarse call of the Russian sentinel under her window, was music far sweeter than ever chanted the nightingales of the Danube valley! There was Liberty around, and Life and Love before her! The waiting circle of her body guard started back in surprise, as the stately beauty was led into the assembly room, where the Russian ladies had furnished her feminine equipment for the triumphal voyage to Moscow. "You are more than beautiful, darling," whispered Paul Denton, as he led her to the window for a last glimpse of the dainty steamer "Olga," lying below them in the harbor! "You are wonderfully beautiful, but," he smiled. "I shall always regret the vanished Princess Nourmahal!" For, the lady of his love was no longer the Pearl of the Harem! The thousand purses were but fairy gold, and the road so stony for her tender feet was leading her homeward—at last!

"Remember!" laughed the ladies of Baku in chorus, as the special train whistled its warning, "You owe us a return visit! Else we shall think you, only to have been a sweet dream of the night!"

The duties of the escort were now limited to the buoyant Major Petrovitch and Kassim, who were to go on with them as far as Vladikaukas. The Major was proudly restless under his new title, but Kassim, bearing the trophy of Mustapha's sabre, was diligent in every assurance as to the future well being of the camel which was to be under his special protection! And, soon the Caspian shores faded far away behind them, their cares falling from their burdened shoulders, even as the wild winds scatter the needles of the swaying pines! Astern disciplinarian was Doctor Alan Randall. "I have here three patients! I absolutely forbid all reference to our little escapades over the border! For, if I mistake not, the whole story will be told, for the first time, at Moscow!" Colonel Soltykoff was touched at Randall's delicate prevision! "It will be as well, Colonel, that these two stricken women should never know the dark tragedy of Count Arpad's death!

Let them find out, later, that he fell a victim to the dangerous climate! A second shock might be a grave menace to Countess Magda's recovery, and—our beautiful wanderer must now find brother and husband, in her game and gallant lover!" "It shall be so!" said Serge Soltykoff, sighing, but his heart was sad, when he thought of the bright faced lad who fell under the sabres of the hidden Moslem cowards! And, his stern soldierly face grew grim, as he saw again, Mustapha Pasha, pitching wildly forward, in the wreathed smoke of the fight to the death!

"Blood pays all debts!" mused Serge, as he gazed beyond him, at the far away Kaukas range, with a heart hungering for the unpaid debt of the love of all these long years! What waited for him beyond those snowy crests? He dared not hope!

While Paul Denton marvelled at the brevity of the run to Tiflis, Colonel Soltykoff left the young lovers to their growing enchantment. Doctor Alan Randall lent his professional gravity to the council of Major Petrovitch and his gallant chief. Before the train ran down into the basin of Tiflis, Petrovitch was ready to secure the special relay post to whirl them through the gorges of the Caucasus.

"Let me see!" said Soltykoff. "Four days to Vladikaukas! Then four more of rail travel via Rostov-Kharkov, and Kursk, to Moscow! I had better have Major Denton meet me secretly at Kursk. He can prepare Magda Falka for the return of her daughter! Yes! I will telegraph to him! The whole party shall be met at Moscow by my Intendant and entertained at the Slaviansky Bazaar Hotel! Doctor, you must be responsible for the details of this meeting!"

"There is but one pious fraud to which we are all bound!" gravely answered Alan Randall! Let the mother and daughter still think that Arpad is far away searching the interior of far off Aleppo and Mesopotamia, with McIvor Pasha! You can easily have Ambassador Nelidoff later forward a well devised circum-

stantial account of Count Arpad's death, say sent on from the Russian Consul at Bagdad. Syrian fever will be a very natural danger of his long quest! In this way both of these women will be strengthened by the joys of reunion, and, Ilma should not delay a union with Denton! You have some claims on both mother and daughter, Colonel! I would insist upon an immediate marriage! Travel will soon restore Ilma Falka's shattered nerves, and the happy anti-climax of the long ordeal is nature's magic heart healer! She must marry, at once!" "I will speak to her mother, and, urge an immediate marriage!" This woman must have all the protection of a loving husband! It will be an excellent excuse that Paul Denton must soon go back to America and arrange for his diplomatic future!"

"You must not neglect the mother!" anxiously said Randall! "Countess Magda shall have all the benefit of new scenes and a long stay in Russia! I propose to brighten her life!" answered Soltykoff with a curious smile! "She must not be left alone!" As he walked away Alan Randall began to see the drift of the gallant Russian's plans at last. "I may be a pretty fair physician," mused Randall, "but I had better be looking around now in search of a wife! There seems to be a matrimonial epidemic in the near future! That is, if Soltykoff carries his point, and he is not the man to be denied now!"

Before the wayfarers arrived at the rendezvous at Kursk, there was a scene of peculiar interest to the timorous Minister of the Household of Nasr-ed-Din enacted in the splendid Palace of the Negaristan, at Teheran! The Shah had recently learned from a personal audience of the Russian Minister that a most regrettable collision had occurred between the retiring Russian Guards of the Legation and his own troops at Assur!

The Lord of Lords and King of Kings expressed a cold unconcern as to the severe losses of his soldiers!

"The blunderers shall be sorely punished!" he remarked. "I will send you the head of the commander!" The happy Russian diplomat gratefully declined this liberal proffer! "Then there are other punishments! They shall suffer! And, my ministers shall at once officially apologize and make good all damages to your escort."

The "incident was not closed," however, when the Russian diplomat departed, for he had the cipher news of the arrival of the happy fugitives at Kharkov. "All's well that ends well!" the Minister muttered. "I will not worry the Lion of Persia! It seems that we are quits, and the honors are ours!" But, seated at his royal table in the Gulistan's halls, the Shah suddenly remembered the dead Mustapha's quest! A dull anger burned then in his sensual eyes! Though superb Sevres and Dresden ware, with rich silver, decorated the table, with its perfumed central fountain—and the wines, and liqueurs of the Frank, cheered him, the Shah gazed in a sullen discontent at the lovely women around him. The Pearl of the Harem had vanished forever! In the great room with its superb alabaster dados, its grand Persian fawn colored carpet, the marble pillars holding up its matchless roof of fretted "gatch" stucco work, the King of Kings gave way to a growing resentment! There were a hundred lovely women wandering around the sunken gardens, where the music breathed in dying strains, and the inlaid mirrors of the ceiling flashed back all the charms of the languishing beauties near him! "I have been outwitted! They have stolen the girl!" he growled. And then the words of his Ambassador at Stamboul came back, "She is the day star of all women, and as lovely as the fabled Nourmahal! A young goddess, with eyes of the gazelle and the form of a houri!" The trembling Minister of the Royal Pleasures bowed before his master! "Tell me of this rumored battle!" sternly said the Shah.

"It was the accursed Mustapha, dog and renegade!" cried the frightened pander, falling on his knees. "He

led the advance guard of the soldiers into an attack on the Russians! They had captured the guide, Kassim, who alone knew the fugitive! Mustapha was the only other one of the party who could recognize her! The Russian soldiers beat off our men, and they hastened out of Persia by Farahabad! There was no woman with them! Mustapha was killed! The guide has never been seen since! The Russians probably killed him also. The officer waits the royal pleasure. He only supported the attack until he knew the foes were the Russians of the Legation Guard! Then he gave over all further fighting at once!"

"And, the girl!" the King of Kings growled, with flashing eyes. "Ah! She must have been smuggled out by Balfrush on the Russian steamer to Baku by the missionaries! There was one who reached there in advance of our men! He had camels and litters! It is too late!"

"Let that dog of a commander be beaten and then degraded! Send him to the turquoise mines to work in chains, for life! I would see the two women slaves myself and question them! Let them, then, be then sent back to Stamboul!" There was a silver lining to the cloud which overshadowed Nasr-ed-Din, whose tastes for European beauty had been whetted by the long visit in which he had drained the Cup of Pleasure in the European capitals! "Lord of Lords! Ruler of Kings!" murmured his Minister. "The Ambassador of Abdul Aziz has informed me that a safe conduct has been granted to your Ambassador at Stamboul, who sends hither a marvelous Frankish music girl, also a witching beauty of the Danube! She has the voice of the bulbul, and the fair slave is a dancer able to thread the single hair bridge of Al Sirat! And the caravan bringing her may daily be expected! Your Ambassador at Stamboul has seen the slave and he has listened to her singing, and marked the witchery of her wonderful dancing!" A gleam of vicious curiosity lit the royal debaucher's eye. "Hark you!"

he cried. "She comes here to the Gulistan! Send out runners to meet them! Your head will be the gage of any strange accident! Look to it!" And the "Holder of the Girdle of Beautiful Forms" fled the royal presence!

"We may yet divide the thousand purses!" he gleefully cried. "For the Osmanli Ambassador will now aid me, and our own Stamboul friend declares that none can surpass her! She shall be arrayed as a queen, and be decked out in jewels! Who knows that she may not surpass this sly Frankish devil who fled away?" The decidedly pleasurable auspices of her debut at the court of Persia, were as yet unknown to the singing girl who was Mustapha's accessory in the murder of Arpad!

But, beautiful "Marie the Devil" had already learned that a woman's wit can rule, even in harem bowers! Her senile admirer was made her unwilling slave, and the music hall waif went forth light-hearted to the dazzling delights of the Gulistan! No one saw Serge Soltykoff leap off the train as the Moscow bound pilgrims saw Kursk, smiling in its splendid gardens at the junction of the Koura and the Touskara! Mountain and valley smiled in peace and plenty, and the cross glittered over a score of splendid churches high above them! "Nearing home!" muttered Serge. "Only fifteen hours to Moscow, and —"

"Magda!" gasped Serge Soltykoff, when Fraser Denton clasped him in a bear's hug! "She is as beautiful as ever!" cried the happy man, "and her heart swells with love and gratitude! Ilma!"

"Is in superb health! only we have now made her a Cossack princess! Come away with me, Fraser! We must arrange for your little début. I told Denton and Randall to keep her out of our sight! They think that I'm busied about the train!"

"And, is the dog really dead?" anxiously questioned the American veteran. "I've telegraphed all the facts

to McIvor at Cairo! But, Bela and I will not believe that Magda is safe until we have your word! Her joy has restored her!"

"I will show you the sabre I wrenched out of his own dead hand! And the rifle that I killed him with! His long account is closed forever!" sternly said Soltykoff. "He fell in fair fight, and by my hand!"

"There is a reward waiting for you, Serge!" said the American, softly. "There are golden years before you now! For there is no ban of the past resting on Magda now! What do you intend to do?"

"I shall ask you to aid me to marry off these two young lovers, and then pack them off to America!" slowly answered Soltykoff. "Then I propose to give some time to my own private affairs!" The Russian chevalier blushed even under the desert tan! "I propose to open the Soltykoff mansion again, and if Countess Magda ever crosses its threshold I shall hold her there—a prisoner for life! Come into the car now! Remember your rôle! Betray nothing about Arpad's fate! Don't forget your part!" "It's an easy one!" smiled Denton, "for Bela and Aida only wait for your arrival to be married! Those impetuous young people do not propose to be balked by fate! Bela has been promoted and ordered on palace duty at Vienna. Tell me of Paul. How did he play his part?"

"Like a man!" said Soltykoff. "He covered the girl he loved with his body after he was wounded and fired twenty shots into the mob at the barricaded door of the tower, while his rifle streamed with his own blood! Kassim says that he is 'Taib Kétir!' which is Arabic for 'way up!' He is game to the last!"

"There is an attaché of the Austrian Embassy already waiting at Moscow to tender all the facilities of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy to Countess Magda Falka and her daughter!" said Major Denton. "Ah! I wish nothing done officially. You see," confidentially whispered Soltykoff, "it might embroil the Russian and English Ministers at Teheran with the Shah's

grovelling Ministers! We owe Ilma's life to that gallant little English woman! Let us call the incident closed,' as the French would say!" "You are right!" mused Denton. "The Austrian diplomat tells me that Major Horace Derwent is already gazetted to the vacant military attachéship at St. Petersburg! That will take his spirited young wife out of the reach of Persian revenge! They are already at Trebizond!" "By heavens! I'll capture them on their way and give them such a Russian welcome as they never dreamed of!" cried Soltykoff, as they entered the train. "Wait here! I will bring Paul!" And Soltykoff lured the young American just long enough from the side of the happy Hungarian beauty to have a few words with Fraser Denton before Doctor Randall prepared the rescued girl for her first happy surprise! Serge Soltykoff was busied with the dispatch of various telegrams to the people of his household in Moscow, and his eye brightened when he read his intendant's dispatch: "All your orders have been executed!"

Alas! for the vanity of manhood! Soltykoff left Fraser Denton gently leading Ilma Falka along the history of the long months veiled to her, and she knew now that her mother was not yet aware of the happy invasion of the long closed Soltykoff mansion! "We must only trust to Colonel Serge and the Doctor as Masters of Ceremony," said the American veteran. "Bela and Aida are busying her with her first glimpses of the City of Four Hundred Churches! Let us trust all to them!" Soltykoff eyed his dingy undress uniform, the shoulder slashed to relieve his healing wound, and the railway mirror, too, showed him the lines of care on his sunburned visage. His outer man was not the preux chevalier of Viennese palace ball rooms, but only a stern and worn campaigner! "Will she know me?" the soldier mused. "I must take my chances!" He had noted the marvelous rejuvenation of Ilma and Paul Denton! The Magyar maiden's short, crisp curls were now daily turning to gold once

more and her eyes burned in a dark brilliance which astonished even Soltykoff! The philtre of Love coursing in every vein was poured by the hand of youth! And now, with an eager impatience, she counted the very stations as they sped on, and the eager Paul Denton found her tender eyes drooping now under his ardent gaze!

There was a bright sun dancing on the waters of the Moskwa and glittering on the innumerable domes of the city of the Tsars, as the train sped through the picturesque suburbs and rolled into the Kursk depot! It was Serge Soltykoff who led Countess Ilma to his carriage, while a marshaled band of his retainers, led by the Intendant, quickly placed the remainder of the party. Leaning forward, a burning color upon her cheeks, the girl gazed upon the most wonderful architectural melange of the world! Wealth and poverty side by side, a maze of palaces, churches, monuments, and superb residences, with the people of every nation and blood streaming through the streets of Russia's Rome.

With a sweep the leading carriage dashed into the courtyard of a superb mansion in the "white city" of the great metropolis! There were lines of uncovered footmen, and the girl was dazzled by the splendors of the vast hallway! Her heart was beating fast, for Soltykoff had leaned over and tenderly kissed her brow as she crossed the threshold!

"May God bless you! My own darling!" the soldier whispered. "This is your home, and, you are near your journey's end!"

The old house butler whispered a word to the master, whom he had known as a prattling child!

"Come!" said Serge, and then he led the silent maiden up the grand stairway! The girl's eyes turned to him in a fond ecstasy as he stood before her with his hand upon a door!

"My mother's rooms!" he said softly, as he slowly turned the latch! With a wild cry of delight the "Prin-

cess Nourmahal" sprung through the doorway! For she knew at last the gentle arts of the man who had led her back to her mother's opened arms!

Colonel Soltykoff, with some little diplomacy, effaced himself while the Dentons were also reunited, and Bela Batthyani was called into the state apartment, where Ilma Falka's head now rested on her mother's throbbing bosom! The splendid hall below was spread with the feast of welcome; and the silver gong had rung out in vain before Serge Soltykoff descended into the grand drawing room to marshal his guests! The Colonel was again the military cavalier of Vienna, with a desert tan.

There were two only wanting to complete the circle, and Soltykoff hardly raised his eyes as Ilma laid her light hand upon his arm. Her lips scarcely moved, but her eyes, burning in tender gratitude, told the hidden story! "*Some one is waiting for you!*" she whispered, as they gained the hall, alone. "You said that this was my home! Then, I must rule it! Come with me!" The soldier's heart was beating wildly now.

Soltykoff never heard the light foot as it fled away down the stair again, but he saw the girl standing there below him, her face glowing and transfigured with her own happiness! And her rosy finger silently pointed the way where he hesitated! For the man who feared not Mustapha's lifted sabre trembled there at the threshold in the crowning moment!

There was a woman standing at the window of the great boudoir, and her face seemed turned away from him! Soltykoff was at her side before she had spoken, and she was tenderly sobbing on his heart before she heard his voice! And neither heard the spoken words as their hearts throbbed on in an exquisite bliss. They were standing under the picture of the gentle and gracious woman who had ruled the splendid mansion in the vanished years!

Soltykoff kissed the trembling lips of the beautiful

woman, now prisoned in his arms! "Let me lead you down! For this is your own Russian domain! They wait, only for you!"

"I must tell you the story of the past!" she faltered. "There is nothing to hide now! You have given back to me more than life!"

"There is nothing to tell, only that you will repay! A life for a life! For you are in Russia now, and you are in my power! When Paul and Ilma have gone back to Vienna you shall tell me what you will!" The bells of the great city pealed out then in a sonorous clangor as he spoke. "They sound like wedding bells!" said the happy soldier, as he took her gentle hand, and then led her down into the great hall! Before them all he seated Countess Magda in the place which was now to be her very own! The song of the bells was still echoing in every heart, for their sweet message had reached them all!

The most artful duplicity of Bela Batthyani succeeded in convincing Major Denton and Countess Magda Falka that the presence of the Austrian attaché was officially necessary at the weddings of Ilma and Aida! Batthyani's palace duties called him back, and Doctor Alan Randall artfully aided the young Austrian's special pleading. "It will be far better to avoid the never-ending stories of the vanished "Princess Nourmahal!" And so, the Russian welcome to all was extended into a double wedding merry making! Paul Denton's fond mother and the Major consented to remain a month as guests of Colonel Soltvkoff, after the triumphant departure of the beautiful brides!

The Smolensk railway station never saw a jollier departure than on the evening when floods of champagne were the last offerings of the escorting wedding guests! The slim, dandified Austrian attaché wondered at the "maimed" rites of the wedding of a daughter of the proud Falkas! But, he accepted Bela's theory of the varied and cogent reasons for this undue haste!

'And these same flimsy reasons were most satisfactory to the other parties of the double ceremony!

In fact, the young lovers were on the Danube before Faröe Moses had forwarded two superb pearl necklaces for the vanished brides! One was the offering of stout old McIvor Pasha, and the other was the great dragoman's gift! For, Ambassador Nelidoff had kept his word and Faröe Moses had received his coveted passport, to enter the Russian dominions, as a "persona grata!" It had been the dream of his life, and, honestly he had earned the special boon. Colonel Soltykoff smiled as he recognized the crafty social work of Batthyani and Doctor Randall, but he was not altogether guileless, himself! It was but a fortnight afterward when Major Fraser Denton found the sudden necessity facing him of conveying Paul Denton's mother back to the genial shelter of Vienna! Even that pleasant widow,—a matchmaker at heart—murmured her fears of the "rigors of a Moscow winter." And then Serge Soltykoff's great coup de main was delivered. The visit of an Imperial Grand Duke, who honored the brilliant soldier with his friendship, enabled Serge to astonish his three guests. "I have been tendered the position of Chief Aide de Camp to His Imperial Highness, who will be Governor General of Moscow! It is a superb position,—and one which would enable me to overlook my long neglected family estates."

Countess Magda's heart beat tumultuously, as she listened to her gallant lover! "There is but one embarrassment! His Highness goes to the Mediterranean for the winter, and, it would be my duty to accompany him, until he returns to relieve General Gourko."

"I can not be separated from you, Serge!" whispered Magda Falka. "I have no one, now, and—it may be months before I hear from Arpad!" "Then," said Soltykoff, drawing her to his heart, "we must be married, before I go! One passport will cover the voyage over the frontiers, and," he smiled,

"there will thus be no separation! *You would not ruin my military prospects?*" The loving woman placed her slender hand in his, while he blushed at his excusable strategy. "When you will!" she whispered! To which graceful self-surrender Colonel Soltykoff, with cheerful military promptness, answered "To-morrow, then! For I will, in that case, be immediately eligible for this staff appointment!" It fell out that the gracious Imperial Highness attended the ceremony, and his superb wedding gift was accompanied by a burst of confidence! "I may as well tell you, Countess Soltykoff, that I would have given your husband a leave of absence if he had asked for it! He would not have lost his position!" And, then, the Countess Soltykoff realized the sly flank movement of her lord and master. "I thank Your Imperial Highness for your gracious words!" she said, with a deep courtesy, "but, as I have joined the army I would not like to hurt the prospects of my superior officer!" The Grand Duke laughed. "I must steal the words of the unhappy Napoleon III.—*'C'est magnifique, mais, ce n'est pas la guerre!'* However, all's fair in Love and War, and I am sure that neither of you will ever regret it! For Soltykoff has gained a loving and lovely wife, and our house has gained—a peerless Russian subject!"

The "staff appointment" and the military measures carried Major Fraser Denton and Paul's mother conveniently away to the Austrian frontier! "I will have to go on to the East on the affairs of my companies!" soberly said Fraser Denton, to Soltykoff, "and I will correspond with you, at Nice! I will at the time you feel justified, see that the Russian consul at Bagdad sends you on the proper news of poor Count Arpad's demise! It seems a shade on your happiness, but,—"
the veteran sighed, "I have found in life that Sorrow is the shadow of Joy; that no happiness or success comes without its accompanying trial, and—that we pay the price for all we receive here, below! You

have paid the price, in advance, and may God grant this to be your only chastening blow!" His own heart throbbed in its lonely love, the saddest of all loves, the love that is a memory,—for—he thought of the vacant chair that had never been filled in his own home. "Fraser," said Soltykoff, "you will have Bela and Aida to cheer you! You have gained two homes! For, Schloss Falkenstein must go to Bela, in the future,—and you will have another home—here,—in Moscow!" The happy soldier read the secret of the veteran's sad philosophy! The passive endurance of the one who is left to mourn! And, so, the Major went out again on the path of duty.

It was a peculiar stroke of good fortune that gave over Major Horace Derwent and his spirited wife into the hands of the Soltykoffs while the Grand Duke made his leisurely preparations for the journey to the Riviera! Madame la Comtesse Soltykoff noted the delay and murmured, "Serge! You married me, a month too soon! It was not a real necessity!" "It could not have been delayed, another day!" gravely replied her gallant husband. "But, let us go now, and pounce down upon these English friends!" When Major Derwent was allowed to escape to the waiting delights of Petersburg, Mrs. Mary Derwent found that a subtle all pervading influence had made her paths strangely pleasant! She understood it, when Magda Soltykoff clasped a superb diamond bracelet on the slender wrist! The words "For Life," told the story of a mother's gratitude! "The Intendant has my orders that you must always use my home when in Moscow!" cried Soltykoff at parting! "Remember! His dismissal is in your hands!" Magda knew all the story of Mary Derwent's wit and bravery, and, there was but one last parting which brought a pang to the married lovers! For, Doctor Alan Randall was bending his steps again toward his forgotten American home. The game young missionary was deaf to the splendid offers he received to ally himself

with the Russian Imperial Service. "The fact is," said Doctor Randall, "I have found that the dull resistance of Islam makes our Persian mission work almost useless! Our only followers, after all, are Armenians, who are native Christians! The 'sick man' must go the way of the doomed, perhaps, of the damned, before we can gain the hearts of his children, tied down by generations of rooted prejudice, and a bestial system of the degradation of womanhood! Any nation can be gauged by the worth and standing of its women! The woman of Islam is a child minded puppet, a mere creature to command." "And, we can really do nothing for you?" cried Magda Soltykoff, with kindling eyes! Randall was leaving Moscow, in great state! His simple nature resisted the splendid bribes of kindness! "Yes! You can!" vigorously said Alan, in adieu. "Do not forget me! Keep me in your hearts, warm in your life and love! I am going," he whispered confidentially to the Countess, "to America, in search of a wife! And, should I fail there, I may come back here, to hospitable Russia, or to your own witching Vienna, and try and find some one like the 'Princess Nourmahal,' or—like yourself!" He kissed the happy woman's hands, and left them, gazing lovingly after him! "A game fellow and a true man!" cried Soltykoff, as they turned away. "He merits what I have found, Magda! The one heaven on earth, of a loving woman's heart."

THE END.

